Duquesne University

THE SPIRIT OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL:

OR,

A HOLY MODEL,

WORTHY OF BEING IMITATED BY ECCLESIASTICS, RELIGIOUS, AND ALL THE FAITHFUL.

Translated from the Work of the Learned

M. ANDRE-JOSEPH ANSART,

CONVENTUAL PRIEST OF THE ORDER OF MALTA, ADVOCATE IN PARLIAMENT, DOCTOR OF LAWS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF PARIS, ETC., ETC.

BY THE SISTERS OF CHARITY,

MOUNT ST. VINCENT, NEW YORK.

PERMISSU SUPERIORUM.

Holy Ghost College
SCHOLASTICATE
Pittsburgh, Pa.

NEW YORK:
P. O'SHEA, PUBLISHER,
27 BARCLAY STREET.

BX4700
.V6
A5
1868x

~~922~~
~~V768an~~

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1867,

BY P. O'SHEA,

In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States, for the Southern District of New York.

TO ALL

DESIROUS OF THE

SPIRIT OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL,

THIS TRANSLATION IS

RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED.

Our author remarks truly, that there are some persons whom the good never weary of admiring. Hence, the different treatises on St. Vincent de Paul, far from exhausting the admiration of the public, have served but to increase it. The lustre of his virtues makes an impression on such as would delight in finding reason to disparage him. When we consider his character, we know not which to esteem most, his profound wisdom in council, his courageous, enterprising spirit, his address and circumspection in directing souls, or his active benevolence and tender charity, of which he has left everywhere such extraordinary and enduring traces. He was *naturally* compassionate, grace rendered him charitable; he multiplied the succors he bestowed in proportion to the increasing wants of the poor, and gave as much in alms as it was possible for him to give. His great enterprises still subsist, the father lives in his children, and preserves in Heaven the same zeal for advancing the charitable undertakings which on earth he was inspired to commence. It is owing to the benign influence of the Saint that so many are joined together in his name to relieve the destitute and afflicted.

Catholic Circulating Library

40835

PREFACE.

Dilectus Deo et hominibus. Vincent of Paul had the two-fold advantage of being loved by God and by men. *Dilectus Deo.* The Father of Lights had loaded him with His most precious favors; purity of life, shining piety, unshaken faith, consummate prudence, patience proof against the most excruciating sufferings, indefatigable courage in embracing the holy rigors of penance, humility averse to all ambition, willingness to pardon injuries; in fine, such a zeal for the salvation of souls, as could not be damped or diminished by any difficulty; yet these were but some few of the characteristic traits of Vincent. To these must be added, his amiable frankness, and ingenuous simplicity, guided by the spirit of wisdom, his modesty seasoned by a holy cheerfulness, his tender compassion for the poor, his vehement and continual application to restore to religion its primitive fervor and to the clergy their first lustre. Such was Vincent. *Dilectus Deo.*

Born to remedy great evils, he lived in a time when

heresy and intestine wars had spread horror and desolation over France. Some had shaken off the yoke of religion; others no longer respected the royal authority. Even the princes, who ought to have restrained the multitude, gave the fatal example of insubordination. The provinces were divided into factions, at arms with one another. Wherever Calvinism was dominant, churches were destroyed, priests pursued, or inhumanly slaughtered, our holiest mysteries ruthlessly trodden under foot, the offering of the perpetual sacrifice abolished. What was the affliction of Vincent on finding there was no longer truth in the deceitful mouths of the children of men, that the greater number of pastors were yielding to a criminal inaction, and the people were left in a profound ignorance. He was not an idle spectator of such great evils. He applied himself with ardor to rekindle the zeal of pastors, to enlighten the people, and to enforce that discipline which had been relaxed. *Dilectus Deo.*

The first means he employed was the missions. Animated with the spirit of the apostles, he carried the Gospel wherever Providence, by the authority of the first pastors, conducted him. Success corresponded to the extent of his labors. He rekindled the zeal of the clergy, or else, if he could not, supplied for it either himself or by the worthy laborers he had associated with him. To render his ministry fruitful, he joined to it all the duties of charity. He believed he was ac-

countable for all the good which was neglected, and for all the evil that was done. He remarked that the country people were neither cared for nor instructed, and that their appointed pastors allowed them to languish in ignorance and disorder. His zeal for their good enkindled; he believed himself specially charged to announce to them the Gospel, and he preached to them with the more joy as he found they possessed more simple faith, and more docile hearts. He visited, with incredible fatigue, market towns, villages, the most remote hamlets, and the most inaccessible places. He went in quest of souls that were vile in the opinion of the profane, yet precious before Jesus Christ. He taught them the mysteries of our holy religion, the rules of Christian morality, and brought them, as so many prodigals, to the house of their Father. *Dilectus Deo et hominibus.*

Although stationed in the capital, and occupied with most important duties, he never lost sight of his friends, the poor. His natural tenderness for them became daily more active and ingenious in discovering and relieving their necessities. There was no work of charity for which he did not find unfailing resources. Old men, bending under the weight of years, orphans, foundlings, galley-slaves, the sick poor, and entire provinces, which intestine or foreign wars had desolated or reduced to the most direful extremity, found a father and liberator in Vincent. We find him pro-

curing for one person health, for another liberty,—here, a Christian education, there, an honorable employment. In Paris, owing to his exertions, several superb hospitals were erected, as asylums for the poor overrunning the city. No affliction was overlooked by the boundless charity of this holy man; and finally, that nothing might be wanting to the heroism of such great works, he united the care of the soul to that of the body. *Dilectus Deo et hominibus.*

Thus was Vincent one of those men of mercy, the records of whose piety will subsist forever in the annals of the church. He was regarded by kings, princes, ministers, bishops, magistrates, nobility, and people, in the expressive words of Bossuet, "as the Saint of his age." He was the model of pastors, the father of the indigent, the support of bishops, the counsellor of kings, the reformer of the clergy, the defender of the Church, and the soul of all the great works undertaken, during his life, for the glory of God. Notwithstanding the poverty he professed, he was able to distribute more alms during twenty years, than many Sovereigns have given in a whole century. His zeal had no other bounds than the universe. Without leaving Paris, he set all France, Great Britain, Italy and Poland, in movement. It was he who after having supplied all the wants of the inhabitants of the cold Hebrides, enkindled new flames in climates already scorching; and endeavored, at the same time, to sanctify the Slaves in

Algiers, and the islanders of Madagascar. It was he to whose virtue trophies are erected from pole to pole. It was he, in fine, who triumphantly upheld piety when the multitude of sinners seemed to threaten its ruin. He opened the houses of his congregation, as so many sacred asylums, where piety received a new stimulus, and made innumerable conquests. Christians, the embarrassments of whose temporal concerns, and still more whose passions, had shut their eyes to the glory of their Heavenly origin, found in Vincent, and his children, so many enlightened guides, and charitable physicians, who taught them to contemn the fleeting things of earth, and to appreciate heavenly things. The innocent and holy, who made these retreats in order to trace out a plan for attaining to a higher perfection, found enlightened counsels in the house of Vincent, and striking examples of every virtue. Such were the fruits of the ten days' spiritual exercises which Vincent had established in his houses. By solitude, silence, pious conversations, prayer and spiritual reading, piety was re-animated, and daily acquired new vigor. *Dilectus Deo et hominibus.*

But the principal care of the holy Priest was the effecting a reform of the clergy, persuaded that this is the source of religion and piety for the people. Following the orders and wishes of the bishops, Vincent prepared seminaries for the priesthood. He spared neither expense nor labor to try them—prayers and in-

structions were employed to animate and prepare them to approach the altar with that innocence of manners, and profound respect which their sacred functions demand. God enabled our Saint to do still more, in forming worthy bishops for the Church Having been named as one of the council of conscience by the Queen Mother Anne of Austria, then regent of the Kingdom, he did much towards raising many apostolic men to the first dignities of the Church; and it is true that the clergy of France were indebted to him for the lustre that distinguished them in that period. Those who shed the most lustre on that state at present, are only the continuation, perhaps, of the good choice which he made. The lustre which continues now is perhaps the result of it. What shall I say of those ecclesiastical conferences upon the Holy Scripture, ecclesiastical discipline, and the morals of pastors, of which Vincent was the promoter? And of that vast number of Seminaries, whose establishment he favored, and to which he gave rules, and furnished with wise directors? *Dilectus Deo et hominibus.*

Vincent had the happiness of meeting, in Madam Le Gras, all the talents necessary for assisting him in the prosecution of his projects. He employed her on different occasions, and in the month of November, 1633, confided to her the Daughters of Charity of whom she was the first Superioress. Her charitable views extended to all. The health of both body

and soul shared her attention. In the wards at the Hotel Dieu, she was seen performing the humblest duties for the sick, and exhorting the dying with a sweet, insinuating, winning eloquence, animated by charity; success was often the recompense of her exertions. To the united labors of these two holy personages, are we indebted for those establishments which serve as so many asylums for the destitute. There are now a number of these holy places; and by the benevolence of our Sovereign, the zeal of his ministers, and the tender compassion of our pastors, they multiply still more in our age, under the name of houses of Charity.

It would be acting contrary to the spirit of Vincent, and degenerating from the humility he so much cherished, to attempt to adorn this book with the ornaments of rhetoric. There should always be some relation between the style of a work and the subject of which it treats, and the best means to succeed, in relating, impressively, the virtuous actions of the Saints, is to describe them in that same spirit which animated them. The more simple and natural our style, the more conformable will it be to its subject. Abelly, Bishop of Rhodes, to whom we are indebted for the life of the Saint, says "that we will be better able to recognize the holy man, in his ordinary equipage;" that is to say, in his accustomed humility and candor — Therefore, we shall not alter the expressions of the Saint, for we cannot give a clearer idea of his interior

dispositions, than by recording his own words. Can we follow surer guides than were Vincent and his contemporary, Abelly? The work of this Bishop is a selection of monuments the public had reared, and which the acclamations of the good have stamped with the firm seal of authority. The life of the Saint, in two volumes, has been of much service to me. Mr. Collet, the author, compiled it from the processes of beatification and canonization of the Saint, a manuscript life written by his first companions, and seven or eight hundred letters written by Vincent himself. I have made a greater use of an abridgement of the life and virtues of the Saint, by an anonymous author, and of a book printed in 1742, under this title: "Breve Compendio della Vita et Miracoli, del glorioso S. Vincenzo de Paoli." Letters written by bishops to the common Father of the faithful, furnish me with the colors for the portraiture of the Saint; and we shall use these colors as they come, giving each of his special virtues in its particular outline.

LIFE OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL.

(FROM THE ROMAN BREVIARY, JULY 19TH.)

VINCENT DE PAUL, a Frenchman, born near Puy, in Aquitaine, exhibited from early youth a wonderful charity for the poor. Having been called to study, from the care of his father's flock, his mind became imbued with human and divine science; decorated with the honors of a theological course, and elevated to the priesthood, he was, after a short career of usefulness, captured by the Turks, and taken off to Africa. But having succeeded, during his captivity, in gaining back to the faith his apostate master, trusting in Divine Providence, and favored by the Blessed Virgin, he fled from the barbarian shore, with his late master, crossed the sea in an open boat, and landed near Marseilles. They then directed their course to Rome, where the penitent master entered the austere order of St. John of God. Vincent returned to France and served the parishes of Clichy and Chatillon in a most edifying manner. The King named him Grand Almoner of the French Galleys, in which capacity he astonished all by the zeal he displayed for the salvation of the officers and convicts. St. Francis de Sales appointed him superior of the Visitation order, and for nearly forty years he discharged the duties of that office, with such prudence as to justify the opinion that the holy Bishop had conceived of him, when he declared that he had never known a more worthy priest than Vincent de Paul. To extreme old age, this holy priest labored indefatigably for the salvation of the poor of the country, and he bound himself and his brethren of his congregation of the Mission to this by a perpetual vow. His zeal for clerical discipline is evinced by the number of Seminaries erected by him, the conferences for clergymen, and the retreats to prepare for ordination, which

he established. To such duties, as well as to pious retreats for the laity, he ordered that the doors of his houses should ever be open. He sent evangelical laborers to propagate faith and piety, not only into various provinces of France, but also into Italy, Poland, Scotland, Ireland, to India and even to the lands of the barbarians.

After assisting Louis XIII. for death, he was named a member of the council on Church affairs, by Ann of Austria, and he most carefully arranged that none but worthy persons should be appointed to bishoprics and Abbeys. He labored to suppress civil wars, duels and growing errors, whose dangers he at once conceived and dreaded, and sought to induce all to pay due obedience to the Holy See. No kind of calamity was known which, with paternal charity, he labored not to relieve; Christians, groaning under Turkish slavery, foundlings, infants exposed in the streets, wayward youth, virgins in danger, nuns driven from their convents by wars, abandoned women, who might yet return to God, galley slaves, wearied pilgrims, infirm artisans, lunatics and beggars innumerable; all such, did he receive and tenderly nourish, either by alms or in the hospitals which he had erected, and which still stand. Lorraine, Champaigne, Picardy and other provinces, desolated by war, famine and pestilence, shared his ample relief. He founded many associations and societies for seeking out and relieving the miserable. The most famous of these and the most widely spread is that of the Sisters of Charity. He protected or fostered many others: the Sisters of Providence, of the Holy Cross and of St. Genevieve, for the education of young ladies. Though ever intent on these and other very weighty affairs of God, he was affable to all, the same to all, in meekness, simplicity, uprightness and humility; he shrank from riches, honors, and worldly pleasures, and was often heard to say that nothing pleased him but in Jesus Christ. At length, quite exhausted with bodily ailments, toil and age, he calmly expired at St. Lazarus, the principal house of his order in Paris, on the twenty-seventh of September, 1660, in the eighty-fifth year of his age. Illustrious by his virtues, his merits and miracles, he was canonized by Clement XII, who designated the nineteenth of July for his festival.

CONTENTS—PART FIRST.

PAGE.

Preface, - - - - - - - - - - - - - 5

Sketch of the Saint's Life, from the Roman Brievary, - - - 13

CHAPTER. I. The Saint's Love of God, - - - - - - 17

II. Charitable Associations, - - - - - - 26

III. His Continual Attention to the Presence of God and to Imitate Jesus Christ, - - 34

IV. His Advice to a Superior, - - - - - - 41

V. His Character, - - - - - - - - 50

VI. His Charity for his Neighbor, - - - - - 60

VII. His Charity for the Poor Galley Slaves, - - 91

VIII. His Conduct and Method of Direction, - - 103

IX. His Ecclesiastical Conferences, - - - 111

X. His Confidence in God and Conformity to His Will, - - - - - - - - - 122

XI. Conversions Effected by St. Vincent de Paul, 132

XII. His Disinterestedness and Detachment from the Goods of Earth, - - - - - - 147

XIII. His Private Devotions, - - - - - - 157

XIV. His Meekness, - - - - - - - - 163

XV. His Equality of Temper, - - - - - 175

XVI. Establishment of his Congregation, - - 179

XVII. Institution of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, - - - - - - - - 195

XVIII. Establishment of a Hospital for Poor Old People and of a General Hospital, - - 210

XIX. Exercises for Aspirants to Holy Orders, - - 223

XX. His Faith, - - - - - - - - - 237

XXI. Humility of Vincent de Paul, - - - - - 241

TABLE OF CONTENTS.

PART SECOND.

CHAPTER.		PAGE.
XXII.	Institution of a Society of Ladies to Aid the Poor,	255
XXIII.	Institution of a Society of Lords for the same Object,	265
XXIV.	His Maxims,	271
XXV.	His Missions,	283
XXVI.	His Mortification,	293
XXVII.	His Occupations,	303
XXVIII.	His Patience,	310
XXIX.	His Poverty,	319
XXX.	His Prudence,	323
XXXI.	His Purity,	330
XXXII.	His Gratitude,	336
XXXIII.	His Rule,	341
XXXIV.	His Respect for the Pope, Bishops and Pastors,	349
XXXV.	His Spiritual Retreats,	354
XXXVI.	His Seminaries,	365
XXXVII.	Services Rendered by Vincent de Paul to Communities of Men and Women, to Armies, and to Countries which had been the Theatre of War,	376
XXXVIII.	Simplicity of Saint Vincent de Paul,	419
XXXIX.	His Talents for the Counsels of Kings,	424
XL.	His Zeal for the Glory of God and Salvation of Souls,	434
	A Nine Days' Devotion in Honor of St Vincent de Paul,	441
	A Novena in Honor of the Saint,	463

Holy Ghost College
SCHOLASTICATE,
Pittsburgh, Pa.

THE SPIRIT OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL.

I.

THE SAINT'S LOVE OF GOD.

To divine the depth of St. Vincent's love of God, we should know the influence of the Holy Spirit on his heart, and with what fidelity he corresponded to the lights he received. God manifests much of the interior life of His servant, in proposing his virtues to the veneration of the faithful during time, but all will not be known until that day on which He will reveal the secrets of hearts. We have, even in this life, an infallible mark, as the beloved Disciple tells us, by which we can discern whether or not a person loves God—the constant observance of His law.—Vincent was most exact in fulfilling all the duties prescribed by it. His whole exterior indicated a perfect union with God, and all his actions were conformed to that eternal law which is the source of all justice. His life was an uninterrupted sacrifice of honors worldly pleasures, and earthly affections.

His heart never experienced more sensible joy than when he contemplated the ineffable glory which God essentially possesses in Himself. His most ardent desire was that God should be better known, served and adored, by his creatures, and he neither did nor said anything but what tended to inspire all with Divine love. From the same love proceeded those tender aspirations which escaped him from time to time: "O, my Savior! O, my Lord! O, Divine Goodness! O, my God! when wilt Thou accord me the grace of being entirely Thine, and of loving Thee alone?" He took the greatest care to purify his intention, and ever bore in mind that the smallest of his actions belonged to his Creator as indisputably as the most heroic. In order to please God in greater things, he habituated himself to pleasing Him in those that are small; so unremitting was his vigilance, that the closest observers of his conduct affirmed that to commit fewer or smaller faults would have been above human nature. His words penetrated the hearts of all who heard him. The Lady of the President of Lamoignon was so sensibly touched on hearing him discourse one day, that, turning to the Duchess of Mantua, afterwards Queen of Poland, she exclaimed: "Madam, might we not say with the Disciples of Emmaus, that our hearts glowed with the ardor of Divine love whilst Mr. Vincent was speaking to us? I assure you my heart seems inflamed and embalmed by the words

of this holy man." "You need not be astonished," replied the Duchess, "for he is an angel of the Lord, bearing on his lips the ardor of that divine love which burns in his heart."

Of the large number of holy priests who attended his weekly conferences, several declared that their principal object in going was to have the happiness of hearing him, and that they felt sensibly disappointed whenever his modesty prevented him from gratifying them. There was so much unction in his words that they touched all hearts. The above-mentioned auditors sometimes said to the missionaries: "How happy you are in seeing and hearing daily, a man so filled with the love of God!" In truth, the fire of his charity was communicated to all who conversed with him. The Archbishop of Vienna said, in his letter to Clement XI., on the 10th of January, 1706: "No sermon, or spiritual reading, could make so deep an impression as did the words of this holy man upon all who had the happiness of conversing with him." Even children, who easily tire of serious conversation, took pleasure in listening to his. "I was very young," said M. de Brienne, Bishop of Coutance, in a letter to the Sovereign Pontiff, Nov. 13th, 1705, "when I first saw this venerable old man, who had much intercourse with my family. I soon conceived the same exalted idea of his sanctity as had the other members of the family; and years have not effaced

from my mind the charms of his conversation."

A sinner hardened in vice was sent to one of the missionaries, in the hope that he might inspire him with better sentiments. But the poor Father could not convert one whose bad habits had become a second nature to him; he, however, introduced him to Vincent, imitating in this the humility of the disciples, who presented to our Saviour the poor possessed person whom they could not cure. The servant of God spoke to the obstinate sinner, entreated, moved and confounded him, and finally had the consolation of seeing the scales fall from his blinded eyes. Soon after he gave sensible proofs of his desire of beginning a new life, for, groaning in his chains, this poor son of iniquity desired to make a Retreat in order to disburden his conscience. He made one with fervor, and persevered in fidelity to his good resolutions. He returned thanks to his liberator, and declared publicly that he had never heard any one speak like him.

Vincent was not content with having an *affective* love for God, and with conceiving elevated sentiments of His goodness, and ardent desires for His glory; but giving proofs of his love by good works, he sought to render his love *effective*, as St. Gregory requires: *Probatio, dilectionis exhibitio est operis.* Hence we find this holy Priest exhorting his brethren "to love God by the labor of their hands and the sweat of their brows, for," said he,

" so many acts of the love of God, and other affections of a tender heart, though very good and desirable, are often, nevertheless, to be suspected, unless they lead to a practical or effective love." " In this," said our Lord, " is my Father glorified, that you bring forth very much fruit," therefore, we must be on our guard, for there are many, who, having their exterior well ordered, and their interior filled with elevated sentiments towards God, are satisfied, and fail in giving practical proof of their love for God, when occasions offer. They flatter themselves with what is the effect of a heated imagination, and content themselves with holding, sweet entertainments with God in prayer they even speak like angels ; but, if there is question of laboring for God, of mortifying themselves, of instructing the poor, of seeking the lost sheep, of accepting sickness, or something humiliating, alas! they are no longer the same persons, their courage fails them. No, no, let us not deceive ourselves. *Totum opus nostrum in operatione consistit.** I hold this from a great servant of God, who, finding himself on his death-bed, told me: " I see clearly in this hour, that what some take for contemplation, ravishments, exstacies, anagogical movements, and Divine unions, are so much smoke, proceeding from a delusive curiosity, or spring-

* Our whole duty consists in action.

ing from minds having naturally some inclination to virtue; whereas every good action is a genuine coin marked with the love of God:" *Totum opus nostrum in operatione consistit.* The apostle declares to us that our works only will into the other life accompany us. Therefore, let us reflect on this, so much the more, since in this age there are those who seem virtuous, and are really so, and yet are inclined, nevertheless, to an easy, indolent life, rather than to a laborious, solid devotion. The Church is compared to a great harvest requiring laborers to work in it; hence, in accordance with the Gospel, we should first accumulate light and strength for the soul by prayer, reading and solitude, afterwards communicate a part of our substance to our fellow creatures. This is acting as did our Lord and His apostles; it is joining the duties of Martha and Mary. It is imitating the dove, which digests a part of the food she takes, and then puts the remainder into the mouths of her little ones to nourish them. Thus ought we give testimony to God by our works, that we love him: *Totum opus nostrum in operatione consistit.*

The holy man always saw our Lord Jesus Christ in his neighbor, in order more effectually to excite his heart to render him all the duties of charity. He considered this Divine Savior as Head of the Church in the person of the Sovereign Pontiff, as pontiff, in bishops, as prince of pastors

in priests, as sovereign in kings, as a nobleman in persons of rank, as judge in magistrates, and in other officers. The kingdom of Heaven being compared in the Gospel to a merchant, he saw our Lord as a merchant in the man of traffic, as a worker in the artisan, as a beggar in the poor, as infirm in the sick and as agonizing in the dying. Thus seeing Jesus Christ in all conditions, and in each condition an image of their Redeemer, he was animated to love and serve all creatures in our Lord, and our Lord in all creatures. He urged all with whom he conversed to follow these maxims, thereby to render their charity more perfect towards God and their neighbor.

Finally, he held it as a principle, to do everything for God; nothing through human respect. As the love of God cannot subsist with human respect, he could not endure that any one should act with a desire to please men. One of his Missionaries, who had no fixed residence at Rome, believed that in order to engage the cardinals in his interests, he ought to give their provinces preference in giving missions, since the Holy Father had left him the choice of the field of his labor. Vincent, to whom he wrote concerning it, answered that this design was human and contrary to Christian simplicity! "O, my dear Sir, may God preserve us from doing anything with such base views. His Divine Goodness demands that we should never do good ir order to be es-

teemed, and that we regard Him directly and immediately in all our actions, never doing anything through human respect. Rest assured, my dear Sir, the maxims of the Son of God, and the example of His Hidden Life, are not unavailing, but will produce fruit in proper season, while everything will fail in the hands of him who acts otherwise."

The aversion which the Servant of God had for views of flesh and blood, betrayed itself one day by one of those sudden movements which make known the habitual dispositions of the heart. One of his brethren having accused himself, in the presence of the rest, of human respect, Vincent afflicted that a missionary should seek aught save God, said: "it would be better to be thrown, bound hand and foot, on burning coals, than to do an action to please men." He bewailed the folly of those, who, having only earthly-minded intentions, lose their time and their trouble, although, if this time and trouble were directed to God, they might be turned to so good an account. "The intention," said he, "is as the soul of our works, it enhances greatly their reward and value for, as garments are not ordinarily so much valued for their material as for their ornamental embroidery, so we should not be satisfied with doing good works we should enrich and elevate them by the merit of a holy intention,—doing them to please God alone."

These refined principles generated a desire to procure the glory of God, and to induce all mankind to become actuated with a like desire.—He wished that a true disciple of the Man God should render an account to himself of the motives which prompt him, and question himself before commencing each one of his actions, saying :—"Why do I undertake this thing rather than another? is it to please myself? is it to please a weak creature? or is it only to accomplish the will of God, and to follow the impression of His spirit?" "What a life would we not lead," said he to his brethren, "if we could contract this happy facility of choosing all in God, and for God! Our life would more closely resemble that of the angels, than that of man, it would be in a manner entirely divine, since all our actions would be performed by the grace and impulse of the Holy Spirit." The whole life of the Saint is a proof that he always acted in this manner, as will be confirmed by the great things we are about to set forth.

p 34.

II.

CHARITABLE ASSOCIATIONS.

The circumstance which prompted our Saint to form the Confraternities of Charity demonstrates what he frequently declared, that in the different establishments which claim him as their founder, there was nothing of his own, that all had been accomplished without any design on his part, as he never thought such feeble beginnings would lead to the success which it had pleased God to give them.

As Vincent, on a certain festival, was ascending the pulpit, to preach, Madam de la Chassaigne desired him to recommend to the charity of his auditors a family reduced to extreme indigence, the greater part of whom were lying sick, in a farm-house about half a league from Chatillon. God imparted so much unction and efficacy to his words, that after the sermon, many of his listeners visited the poor people, carrying bread, wine and other necessaries. Vincent also went, and was much surprised to meet a large number returning from the farm. "Here is great charity," said he, "but it is not well directed. These sick people will have too many provisions at a time; this abundant sup

ply will be in part of no avail. What they cannot consume at once will spoil and be lost, and these poor unfortunate beings will be reduced to their former extremity."

This reflection caused Vincent, who possessed an admirable spirit of arrangement, to examine by what means succor might be given not only to this afflicted family, which was the present object of his zeal, but to all persons who might, from time to time, be reduced to the same straits. He conferred with some ladies of wealth and piety, and together, they drew up a set of regulations, which they practiced for some time, before they solicited the sanction and seal of ecclesiastical authority. They did not ask this approbation until they had convinced themselves, by nearly three months' experience that there was no fear of failure; the approbation was then very readily accorded. Thus was the first association or confraternity of charity established at Chatillon. "It would be difficult," says an eye-witness, "to relate all the good it has done, the conversions it has effected, the aid it has afforded the poor, particularly in times of famine and pestilence,"—for the city of Chatillon was visited by this two-fold scourge.

Famine and death had already commenced their ravages, and there was everything to fear for the poor, when the spirit of fortitude and vigilance which the lessons of Vincent had imparted to his disciples, made them hasten to the assistance of the

indigent. Two ladies of the association rented some granaries, placing in them a part of their own grain, and adding all that they were able to get in by a general call upon such persons, through the city and environs, as could contribute to their store; and undaunted by labor or expense, they themselves distributed this grain to the needy.

A still more dreadful scourge succeeded—pestilence desolated Chatillon. The apprehension of so contagious and fearful a disease dismayed the most courageous of the men, while some of the weaker and more timid sex felt no alarm. The ladies of the association could have retired to their country-houses, but they were absolutely resolved not to abandon the poor and sick. The troubles and public disquietude diminished not their presence of mind—an endowment so necessary, yet so rare, on such occasions. Without wishing to tempt God, they placed all confidence in Him. They erected cabins near the city, for lodgings. There they prepared food for the poor, and remedies for the infected. Faithful hands dispensed them to those who were in need. The city of Chatillon was affected at the spectacle thus afforded by persons of so much distinction throughout Breste; and many could hardly restrain their tears on seeing those ladies pass days and nights in those cottages, where, exposed to the infected air, they endured the same inconveniences as the wretched inmates. The cessation of the pestilence

did not end their charitable exertions. The instructions which our Saint had given them were never forgotten.

The inhabitants of neighboring places, having been informed of the advantages which this charitable association conferred on the public, wished to have it established among themselves. The Man of God, much encouraged by this first success, established the association at Ville-Preux, Joigny, Montmorel, and in most of the thirty parishes dependent on the house of Gondi; from thence it passed into Lorraine, Savoy, Italy, and into so many other places, that we cannot enumerate them. The holy priest, who had a particular attraction towards the country poor, who are ordinarily the most abandoned, thought not at first of introducing the new association into large cities. However, he soon found it expedient to establish it in the capital of the kingdom. Although the Hotel Dieu, in Paris, was closed to none, nevertheless, there was in that immense city a very large number of artisans and laborers, who were unwilling, either through shame or from other reasons, to go there when sick. These persons, with whom all fails when they are no longer able to labor, were generally, after a day or two, reduced to the utmost extremities. Some ladies of quality proposed to different pastors to establish these associations of charity, as the best means to remedy this evil, which for a long time they had

been lamenting. Several of these gentlemen conferred with our Saint, and as they were persuaded that a special benediction attended all the works projected by him, they desired him to take charge of the undertaking, adding to his first plan, or retrenching from it, as he should judge the change of circumstances and persons might require. The holy man, in doing so, evinced all that activity which was natural to him, when laboring for the poor. St. Sauveur, was the first parish in which he established the association of charity. Those who were most prejudiced against new establishments were unable to withhold the esteem merited by this one; it spread with such rapidity into almost all the parishes of Paris, that it was evidently one of those works specially protected by God.

It was feared that the first fervor of an association so useful, might relax by degrees, and that the poor would be reduced to the same state, from which, with so much difficulty, they had been withdrawn. Vincent earnestly wished that Providence would raise up some charitable person able to travel over the country, to encourage the members of these associations, to sustain them amidst the contradictions they had to endure, to form them to the service of the sick, and to revive, or maintain among them the spirit of that tender compassion which formed the bond of their union. God delayed not to grant the desires of His servant. He sent him Madam Le Gras. This incomparable

woman was given to her age, according to the opinion of five great bishops, to convince it that neither weakness of sex, delicacy of constitution, nor even the engagements of society, are insupera ble obstacles to salvation.

John le Camus, Bishop of Bellay, the intimate friend of St. Francis de Sales and St. Vincent de Paul, was director to Mademoiselle Le Gras; but, as the obligation of residing in his diocese hindered him from giving her all the assistance which she required, he cast his eyes upon Vincent de Paul, to sustain her in her piety. The holy priest disliked private direction, but deferred, however, on this occasion to the opinion of the Bishop of Bellay. God soon manifested that He had directed everything in this affair, and that he designed to make use of these two great hearts to re-animate the charity of the faithful.

The sight of a director who did not spare himself when there was an opportunity of being useful to his brethren, redoubled the zeal of Mademoiselle Le Gras. She conceived the design of co-operating, as far as she was able, in the execution of the great projects which the holy priest was constantly forming in favor of the unfortunate. Vincent, to whom she communicated her resolution, being very much opposed to precipitation, tried her during four years; this delay, which was, as Mr. Gobillon remarks, in his life of Mademoiselle Le Gras, a kind of noviciate, served only to confirm

her in her first design. The eagerness with which she embraced, during this interval, all the occasions of exercising charity, that presented themselves, convinced her director that it was time to accede to her request; for, besides possessing all the virtues St. Paul requires in widows, charity had for her no difficulty in its exercise that was insurmountable. He proposed that she should visit some of the places where the assemblies of charity had been established. The pious widow obeyed the Saint as she would have obeyed the voice of God himself. As, naturally, travelling would tend to dissipate her mind, her wise director arranged everything with so much wisdom that the journeys of his penitent rendered her more recollected and more fervent. She journeyed over the dioceses of Soissons, Paris, Beauvais, Meaux, de Senlis, de Chartres, and de Chalons en Champagne. On arriving in a place, she assembled the ladies composing the association of charity, and gave them the instructions which they needed, to acquit themselves well of their duties; she made them feel how great and meritorious those duties were before God, and taught them by her own example, to tend the most desperate diseases. She dispensed her alms so freely, that their little funds, often quite exhausted before, were raised by her visit.

As her director desired the salvation of the soul much more than the recovery of bodily health,

Mademoiselle Le Gras, entering into all his views, labored for the one, only to advance the other. She, therefore, never limited her exertions to assuaging the sufferings of the sick and appeasing the hunger of the indigent. Moreover, she established the kingdom of God in the hearts of young persons, of her own sex. These enterprises, of so holy a nature as to have reflected honor on a Paula, or a Fabiola, though often crossed, were more generally applauded. Entire cities have been known to testify most eagerly their gratitude and respect to this accomplished lady, and to load her with benedictions. When she had returned to Paris, she endeavored to enkindle in the hearts of those among her friends who were susceptible of so holy an influence, the beautiful flame which consumed her own heart. Having thus united five or six ladies of her parish—St. Nicholas du Chardonnet, she taught them how to serve the sick. By Vincent's recommendation, she had them follow the rules which he had drawn up for the associations of charity; and by doing so, they persevered, and increased in numbers.

III.

HIS CONSTANT ATTENTION TO THE PRESENCE OF GOD, AND TO IMITATE JESUS CHRIST.

A virtuous priest, who watched Vincent for several years, found him always like Abraham in the presence of his Master,—seeing only Him.—Nothing besides made any impression on his mind. A multiplicity of duties disturbed not his recollection. In good news as in the most sad, he lost not sight of Him. When consulted, upon every kind of business, as often happened, he never answered until he had consulted God. Hence it was, that between the questions and his reply, he made, usually, a little pause to say: "*In Nomine Domini.*" Every time the clock struck, whether alone, in company, in the house or in the city, he uncovered his head, made the sign of the cross and raised his heart to God. On entering his own apartments, those of his brethren, or even that of any one making the exercises of retreat, he would go on his knees to invoke the Holy Spirit; and before leaving, he again knelt, to return thanks for the graces he had received. A sentence, written in large characters, admonished all who entered his house, that they

were under the eye of God. M. Perrochel, Bishop of Bologna, borrowed this idea from him; and these words, "God sees me," emblazoned over the principal entrance of his palace, are still there, in place of his episcopal or armorial bearings. Heaven, earth, and all creatures, invited St. Augustin to love God; the same objects reminded Vincent of His holy presence. When he saw the fields covered with grain, or the trees loaded with fruit, he was struck with admiration, considering the inexhaustible treasures of which God is the source, and blessed that paternal hand which nourishes His creatures. Flowrets, birds, or the almost infinite variety of verdure suggested to him the perfections of their Creator. "Nothing," said he, "is comparable to the beauty of God, since He is the source of all created beauty; from Him the sun and stars borrow their lustre." When at Court, in those superb apartments where crystal and glass give a thousand reflections to a single object, he would exclaim: "O, Lord, if the ingenuity of man can prevent the slightest movement from escaping them, how can I hide myself from Thee?" In fine, it was only because it is impossible to keep our eyes constantly closed, that in journeying, Vincent ever perceived the beauty of the fields, or the enameling of the meadows, for he often denied himself the innocent pleasure arising from the sight of the beauties of nature. Whilst walking the streets of Paris, that city whose tumult and confusion

would excuse distractions, he was almost as much absorbed in God as if he had been entirely alone.

Vincent formed his children to this spirit of recollection. "When a person is watchful over his conduct," he told them, "attention to the presence of God soon becomes habitual, and he familiarizes himself to the constant practice of the will of God. How is it that so many, even in the world, scarce ever lose sight of God? I met with one, a few days since, that made it a matter of conscience to have been distracted three times during the day, from the thought of God. Such people will be our judges and will condemn us before the Divine Majesty;—we who have nothing else to do but to love Him, and to testify our love by our attention and services. We should beseech our Lord to grant us the grace to say with Him: '*My meat is to do the will of Him who sent Me.*' My nourishment and my life is to do the will of God."

To the Saint's constant attention to keep himself in the presence of God, we must join his imitation of Jesus Christ. Persuaded that the disciple is perfect only inasmuch as he resembles his master, he endeavored never to lose sight of his Model. In his words and actions he conveyed as perfect an idea, as a mortal can, of the self-denying life traced by our Saviour. In the counsels he was obliged to give, he endeavored to conform to the maxims of the Son of God, and in firmness, too, by trampling under foot all designs of self-

love, and all fears of having his conduct disapproved by such as love the glory of the world rather than the glory of God. He imitated our Lord also, in the spirit of submission, for he received good and evil with equal indifference; in zeal for the salvation of souls, which incited him to seek, and to induce others to seek the lost sheep, that he would have pursued even to the gates of hell, if there were reason to hope he could snatch it thence.—He conveyed an idea of his Savior in his mortifications, for he never lost sight of the suffering God, who, in the days of His mortal life, had not even a stone whereon to rest His head; and in fine, so eminently in his whole exterior, that a priest, who had conversed intimately with him during fifty years, declared that he had never known him say or do anything which had not some relation to God.

A celebrated Doctor, having asked a person who had known the Saint intimately, what seemed to have been his peculiar and most prominent virtue, was answered, that it was the imitation of Jesus Christ, for this Divine Savior was his eternal model, and the living book he consulted in all his actions. It might have been added, that he opened this book to the learned as well as to the ignorant, to kings and to their subjects. Louis XIII. experienced the truth of this assertion in his last illness, for, having called Vincent de Paul to St. Germain-en-Laye, where his sickness had seized him, the Saint, in order to announce to him his approaching

death, which an evil kind of policy endeavors to hide from the great, said to him by way of salutation: *Timento Dominum, benè erit in extremis.*— This unexpected speech did not alarm a King who was accustomed to nourish his soul with the most beautiful maxims of Holy Scripture; he replied by finishing the verse: *Et in die defunctionis suæ benedicetur.* Two things seemed to occupy this prince; the conversion of Protestants, and the nomination to ecclesiastical dignities. The latter seems an honor during life, but it sometimes costs very dearly at the hour of death. "The King," says Madam de Motteville, "always spoke of the certainty of his approaching death, as of a matter of indifference, and of his passage to eternity as if it were some pleasant journey he was soon to make." Perceiving from his apartment the towers of the Church of St. Denis, where his ashes, after death, would be mingled with those of his royal predecessors, he sometimes remarked, "I shall go from here only to go there." Vincent watched incessantly by him during his last days, and helped him to raise his heart and soul to God. This prince, who saw with unaltered calmness, his last moment approaching, asked our Saint the best method to prepare for death: "Sire," replied Vincent, "it is to imitate Jesus Christ, submitting yourself entirely and perfectly, as He did, to the will of your Heavenly Father."—"Not my will, but Thine be done, O, Jesus!" was the response of this most Christian

Monarch. He expired in these good sentiments, in the arms of our Saint, on the 14th of May, the thirty-second anniversary of his accession to the throne.

Thus Vincent had the Son of God always present to his mind as his model. It was to become more perfectly conformed to Jesus Christ, humbled to annihilation, that he fled even the shadow of ostentation, publishing everywhere the lowness of his origin, passing himself off as an ignorant person, and detesting all pompous language and display of human eloquence. "Our Lord Jesus Christ," said he, "could have imparted a great éclat to His actions, and a sovereign virtue to his words; but it was His will not to do so. He went even farther, for in order to confound our pride still more, by His wonderful humiliations and self-abasement, He willed that His disciples should do much more than He had done. And why? Because He wished to be surpassed in His public actions, in order that He might excel in the lower and more humiliating, of which mankind know not the value. He desired the fruits of the Gospel, not earthly fame. Oh! why do we not follow the example set us by our Divine Master? Why do we not yield the precedence to others? Why do we not always prefer the worst and most humiliating for ourselves? This is assuredly doing what is most pleasing to our Lord, and to please Him should be the sum of our desires. Take then, to-day, the reso-

lution of following Him, and of offering Him little sacrifices. Let us say to Him, and to ourselves: of two thoughts which arise in my mind, I will give expression to the less brilliant, for my own humiliation; I will withhold the more striking, to offer it in sacrifice to God, in the secret recesses of my heart. Yes, it is an evangelical truth that nothing is more pleasing to our Lord than humility of heart, and simplicity of words and actions. It is in these that His spirit resides; in vain will it be sought elsewhere. If you wish to find it then, renounce affectation, the desire of appearing, all pride of intellect and pride of heart, in fine, every vanity and even every gratification of this life." It was thus Vincent imitated the great model shown him on the mountain. Surely, he did not choose the least difficult way!

IV.

HIS ADVICE TO A SUPERIOR.

Those who follow the maxims of human prudence, will find this advice discordant to their feelings, but all such as are animated with the spirit of God, will find herein, couched in simple forms of expression, rules of perfection for themselves, and for all who live under their guidance. Our Saint gave this advice verbally to Mr. Durant, rector at Fontainebleau, who immediately after committed it to writing. "O, Sir, what think you of this employment to which God calls you, of directing souls? What kind of an office do you believe that of the priests of the missions to be, in which they are obliged to direct and guide souls whose impulse God alone knows? Such was the employment of the Son of God upon earth; it was to do this that He descended from Heaven, was born of a Virgin, devoted Himself to labor during every stage of His life, and finally suffered a most agonizing death. Therefore you should conceive a great esteem for the duty to which you are called. But, how will you best acquit yourself of this employment, which has several branches? It requires you to stem the torrent of vices amongst the people, to

govern a seminary, and to inspire sentiments of Christian or Ecclesiastical virtues into the minds of those whom Providence confides to you, that you may contribute to their salvation. This is not properly the work of man, but of God Himself. *Grand opus.* A great work indeed, since it is a continuation of that which was begun by Jesus Christ. Human industry would only spoil all, without the hand of God. No, my dear Sir, neither philosophy, theology, nor sermons can effectually move souls; it is necessary that Jesus Christ unite Himself to us, to work in, and by us, and that we act by His spirit, even as He acted by the spirit of His Father. You must, then, renounce your own sentiments and will, in order that you may be replenished with Jesus Christ.—You know that like causes, ordinarily, produce like effects. A sheep gives being to another sheep; a man to another man. Now, if he who conducts others be animated by a human spirit, those who listen to him, and study to imitate him, will become earthly minded like himself. Whatever he says or does will tend to instil into them superficial, not solid virtue. He will communicate to them the spirit with which he himself is animated; since masters generally impress their own ruling principles on the minds of their disciples. Whereas, if a superior be filled with the spirit of God, all his words will be efficacious. Everything about him will edify, all his actions will be as so many salu-

tary instructions, inclining to virtue all that have the happiness of knowing him.

"To enable you to accomplish your duty, my dear Sir, our Lord must vouchsafe to impart His own sacred characteristics to you; for, as a wild tree bears fruit of the same nature as the seedling engrafted on it, so we, miserable creatures, naturally carnal, and as little able to produce good fruit as the wild thorn, if our Lord but stamp His own character on us, and give us the life-giving principle of His spirit and grace, in fine, if He unite us to Himself, as vine-branches are united to the vine-stock, we shall do what He did upon earth; that is to say, we shall act in a Divine manner, and replenished with this Spirit, like St. Paul, we shall beget spiritual children to Jesus Christ, truly worthy of Him. It is of the utmost importance that you should apply yourself very assiduously to attain to an intimate union with God in prayer. You should look upon this as a means by which you may find all the lights you need in the discharge of so difficult a duty. *Ars artium, scientia scientiorum, regimen animarum.* The direction of souls is the art of arts, the science of sciences. When in doubt, have recourse to God, saying: 'Thou, O, Lord, who art the Father of lights, teach me how to act in this emergency.' I advise you to say thus, not only under trying circumstances, but also, to learn directly from God what you should say, imitating Moses, who announced to the

people of Israel only that with which God had inspired him.

"Moreover, you should preserve your soul in the fear of God; for, alas! many lose sight of themselves while contributing to the salvation of others —being so engrossed with their exterior duties that they forget their own salvation. Saul had been deserving of the crown because he had hitherto lived virtuously under the paternal roof, but upon being raised to the throne, fell so lamentably as to lose the grace of God. St. Paul chastised his body, fearing that after having preached to others, and directed them in the way of salvation, he should himself become a castaway. Now, to avoid the misfortune of Saul, and of Judas, you must attach yourself inviolably to Jesus Christ, often saying to him: Permit not, O, my God, that I should be so unfortunate as to lose my own soul while desiring to save those of others; be you my keeper; do not refuse me these graces, which, through my ministry, you impart to others.— Again, you must recur to God by prayer, in order to obtain what may be wanting to those you direct. In this way you will effect more good than in any other. Jesus Christ was not satisfied with offering, for the salvation of men, His sermons, His labors, His fasts, His blood and His death; He added prayer to all these. As He had no need of prayer for Himself, it must have been for us that He so many times prayed; it was to teach us to

pray either for our own necessities, or for the wants of those in whose salvation we are bound to co-operate with Him.

"Humility is another virtue I recommend to you. Say frequently, O, Lord, in what manner have I rendered myself worthy of such an employment? Have my past works borne any suitable relation to what is now laid on my shoulders, and expected from me? Ah! my God! I shall ruin all, unless you, yourself, direct all my words and works! We should be constantly intent on our imperfections, and we shall find more than enough to keep us humble, not only before God, but before all men, even our inferiors. Above all, do not desire to appear as the superior or head. I do not agree with a person, who said to me some days since, that in order to maintain authority, one must show that he is superior. O, my God! it was not thus that our Savior, Jesus Christ, spoke. He has taught us the contrary, both by word and example, for He tells us that He came not to be served, but to serve, and that he who holds the first place should be as he who is in the last. Deport yourself amongst those who live with you, as if you were one of them. *Quasi unus ex illis.*

"We must refer to God all the good He effects by our instrumentality; on the other hand, we must attribute to ourselves all the evil that happens in the community. Yes, all disorders come principally from the superior, who, either

by his negligence, or bad example, introduces irregularities; for all the members of the body languish when the head is affected. Humility should also cause you to avoid giving way to any self-complacency, which is more apt to insinuate itself amidst such employments as are dazzling to others. O, Sir, this vain complacency is a dangerous poisoner of good works. It is a pest capable of corrupting the holiest actions. In the name of God, beware of this defect, which is the most prejudicial in its effects, to our advancement in the spiritual life, of any that I know. Therefore, like Jesus Christ, speak with humility, avowing that your doctrine is not your own, but that taught in the Gospel. Imitate the Son of God, above all, in the simplicity of His similes, whenever He was speaking to the people. What wonders He could have taught, what secrets of His Divinity and admirable perfections have revealed, since He was the eternal wisdom of the Father? Nevertheless, He spoke intelligibly, making use of the familiar comparisons of a laborer, a vine-dresser, a field, a vine and a grain of mustard seed. Thus you must speak, if you wish to be understood by those to whom you announce the word of God.

"When obliged to act, make use of this reflection: Is that which I am about to do in conformity with the maxims of the Son of God? If you find that it is, do it, but if not—do it not.—When there is question of performing some

good work, say to the Son of God: O, Lord, if you were in my place what would you do on this occasion? How would you instruct the people? How console this sick person? You must show deference to those who represent our Lord to you, holding the place of Superiors. Their experience and the grace which Jesus Christ communicates to them, on account of their office, has taught them many things about governing. I tell you this to engage you to do nothing important or extraordinary, without giving us notice; or, if the affair should be so very urgent, that you would not have time to await our decision, address the nearest superior, and ask him what he would do on a like occasion. We know by experience that God blesses such as act thus, while, on the contrary, those who have acted otherwise, have engaged in affairs that have been a source of pain to them, and of embarrassment to us. Affect no singular mode of governing; tread the beaten path, the usual course, in order to proceed in security. I mean by this that you should conform in all things to the rules and holy customs of the congregation. Introduce no novelties, retrench nothing in use amongst us; be not only a faithful observer of rules, but the most faithful; otherwise, all will go wrong. As you hold the place of our Lord, you must, after His example, be as a torch which both enlightens and warms. Superior causes influence inferior; angels of a superior hierarchy purify, en-

lighten and perfect the intelligences of an inferior hierarchy; in the same way, superiors, pastors, and directors, should purify, illumine and unite to God, the souls which this same God confides to their care; and as Heaven sheds its benign influence on earth, so should those, who are set over others, impart to them that fortitude of spirit, which should animate them. To do this, you must be filled with grace, and Divine light, and your life should be ennobled with good works. It is from his own plentitude that the sun communicates the light of day to the planets. In fine, my dear Sir, you must be as the salt of the earth; *Vos estis sal terræ.* It is your place to prevent corruption from insinuating itself into the flock whose shepherd you will be.

"From the things of God, we must descend to the temporal, for those that are governed by a superior have a body and a soul, hence he must provide for the necessities of the body, following the example set by God, who, beside the works He operates internally, as the generation of the Son, and the procession of the Holy Spirit, acts externally, creating the world, preserving it, and giving yearly new grains to the earth. His adorable Providence extends its cares so far that not a leaflet falls from a tree without His permission; He numbers the hairs of our heads, and nourishes even the sparrow. What could make you better understand that both spiritual

and temporal matters belong to the superior's province? if he ought to apply himself to the former, he should not neglect the latter. When the Son of God began to send His apostles to preach the Gospel, he commanded them not to take money; but, afterwards, when the number of his disciples had increased, He wished that one amongst them should be charged, not only with the support of the poor, but besides, with providing for the necessities of the family. And yet more, He permitted that pious women should follow Him for this purpose; *Quæ ministrabant ei.*

"If He orders us, then, in His Gospel, not to be solicitous for the morrow, He means not that we should neglect what pertains to life and raiment—otherwise, it would be wrong to sow. He wished only to teach us to banish excessive eagerness and solicitude about earthly things."

V

HIS CHARACTER.

To know him thoroughly we must consider him in a three-fold light, in his mental and physical endowments, and in the sentiments of his heart.

He was of medium stature, but well proportioned. He had a large head, broad forehead, eyes bright, but very mild in their expression,—his bearing was grave, with an air of affability which he owed rather to virtue than to nature. A certain simplicity which reigned in his manners and countenance, sufficiently attested the calmness and uprightness of his views. He was of a sanguine, splenetic temperament, and of quite a robust constitution. Whilst going from Marseilles to Narbonne, he was captured, and wounded by a poisoned arrow, shot at him by one of the pirates who captured the French ship. His sojourn in Tunis had so undermined his constitution, that, after his return to France, he was always extremely sensitive to changes in the weather, and in consequence, subject to frequent attacks of fever.

He possessed a noble heart, generous, tender, liberal, and compassionate, firm under sudden

events, intrepid in the discharge of duty; he was always on his guard against the seductions of favor, always attentive to the voice of the distressed, who never experienced, at the offset, that cold reception which at once disconcerts, on the contrary, who found him at every instant as accessible as if he lived but to relieve them. His genuine goodness of heart attached to him all persons making profession of a solid love of virtue. So absolute was his empire over his passions, that their existence could hardly be perceived. He was a tender father, but his affections were so well regulated that he manifested an equal tenderness for each one of his children, and in his numerous family there was no Joseph to excite the jealousy of his brethren. It is rare to see a man engaged like him, in every variety of business, obliged to treat with a vast number of persons, of all ranks, and conditions, constantly exposed to the most dangerous occasions, whose life has been farther removed from all suspicion, or held in more universal esteem.

He had a comprehensive, circumspect mind, capable of accomplishing great things, and difficult to be overreached. When he seriously applied himself to an affair, he saw it in all its bearings—discovered all its attending circumstances, whether small or great. He foresaw the inconveniences that would likely arise, and the consequences that must follow. Whenever he could, he avoided giving advice at once; before giving it, he weighed all the

reasons for and against, consulted God in prayer, and conferred with persons whose experience rendered them able to enlighten him. This trait of character, so absolutely opposed to precipitation, hindered him from ever taking a false step, but "did not," as said the Lady de Lamoignon, "prevent him from doing more good than twenty other saints have done." If, actuated by this principle, "*deliberandum est diu quod statuendum est semel*," he was not precipitate or over eager in the discharge of business, still he was neither disconcerted at the number nor at the difficulties of his pressing duties. He undertook them with a strength of mind superior to all circumstances. He applied himself to them with an enlightened sagacity; he supported the burdens, trials, and delays with a tranquility of which only great souls are capable. When consulted on any important matter, he listened with much attention, without ever interrupting those who spoke. If any one interrupted him, he would instantly stop short, and after the person had ceased speaking, would resume his discourse with admirable presence of mind. His manner of reasoning was just, strong and precise. He expressed himself with a certain natural eloquence calculated to move and convince those who listened to him, particularly when he sought to incite them to the love of virtue. He explained the most difficult questions with so much order and perspicuity, especially when they related to spiritual and eccle-

siastical matters, that he astonished the most expert reasoners. Perfectly versed in the great art of making himself all to all, and of accommodating himself to all minds, Vincent lisped with children, condescending to their juvenile ideas, while to the perfect he spoke the language of the most elevated reason. In discussions of little moment, a man of ordinary capacity might have fancied himself on a level with Vincent; in the management of the most intricate affairs the men of the finest genius in his age could not surpass him. M. de Lamoignon, President of the Parliament in Paris, rendered this testimony to his abilities, and surely a magistrate so well able to appreciate true merit, could not have been deceived.

The holy man was absolutely opposed to all oblique, tortuous ways; he spoke of things as he thought of them; yet his sincerity did not make him offend against prudence. He knew how to observe silence when it was useless to speak. No words ever escaped his lips that betrayed harshness, a want either of esteem, or of charity, for any one. In one word, his disposition made him avoid all singular ways, changes or novelties. It was a principle with him that when things are good we should not be too eager to make them better. He followed the common usage and general views, particularly in matters pertaining to religion. "The human mind," he says, "is active and bustling; the sprightliest and brightest

minds are not always the best, unless they are the most discreet; a person walks in the sure way when he does not wander from that trodden by the greatest number of the wise." He did not stop at the surface of things, he examined their nature end, and consequences; and by that fund of good sense which seemed to excel his other natural endowments, he was enabled to distinguish perfectly well, the true from the false, the good from the bad, and the better from what was less good, even when they were presented to him under the same forms and appearances. Hence, it is true to say, that he had a singular, inherent talent, or gift, for the discernment of spirits, and so great a penetration in fixing on the good and bad qualities of those of whom he was obliged to give an account, that Mr. le Tellier, Chancellor of France, could not speak of him without admiration.

Vincent acted in such a manner, that it was said he fulfilled all justice. Hostile to all exception of persons in the bestowing of benefices, he has been known to disapprove in full council of the nomination of a prelate whose position and family made him formidable to all opposers; and the event, as an eye-witness testifies, proved that he had reason for opposing him. Zealous to uphold the reputation of his neighbor, if, sometimes, he was obliged to hear his defects, he had the holy address of effacing the evil impression, by saying all the good that he knew in favor of the guilty person.

He always imputed accidents to himself, and was scrupulously exact concerning the smallest damage he might occasion. His coachman upset, by chance, some loaves of bread; Vincent, fearing they might not sell so well, paid for them on the spot. I could cite many other traits of the same kind, which might seem trifling to such as know not that the Son of God has authorized them, by bestowing praise on the giving of a glass of cold water, and an alms of two mites. The servant of God was not one of those favorites who sell the royal favors, and dispose, at a high price, of what costs them nothing. The governor of a large city besought him to do him a good office at court, and to secure his services, promised that he would sustain the missionaries in his place, where powerful persons were trying to prevent their establishment. "I will serve you, if I can," Vincent replied, "but as to the priests of the mission, I pray you to leave them in the hands of God; I would prefer that they should not be in your city, to seeing them there by the favor and authority of men."

Averse to disunion and lawsuits, he endeavored to conciliate all minds. If he heard that two families were at variance, he would hasten to them; matters must needs be much embroiled, if he could not adjust them. He used to say: "A law-suit is a morsel very hard to digest, and at best it accomplishes but a bad accommodation between parties." He wrote to a brother superior who had

lost a law-suit: "We have recourse to law as little as we can, and when we are obliged to go to law, we take counsel on both sides. We prefer to relinquish our rights rather than to disedify our neighbor." God, however, permitted that he should be involved in some lawsuits, which he sometimes gained and other times lost, for Providence designed to make him a model to all states, and conditions, and that of suitors at law has need of great and good examples. His manner of conducting a lawsuit was admirable. He alleged all that he could in favor of the opposing party, without omitting anything; pleading their rights as well, and perhaps better than they could themselves. He looked upon solicitations as steps scarcely consistent with equity. He said that a judge who feared God, would pay little attention to them; that he himself, when he was in the Queen's council, counted recommendations as nothing, contenting himself with examining whether the thing demanded were just or unjust. He spared the purse of those who involved him in suits more carefully than he did his own. Once, he even paid the expenses of a suit he had against the inhabitants of Valpuiseau; he did more, he supported and lodged them during the trial of the cause, and gave them money for their journey home.

We shall not dissemble, that the critic reproaches him with two defects; first, that he was too slow in making a decision; secondly, that he

said too much good of his neighbor and too much evil of himself. I own that Vincent was somewhat singular in these two points, but this peculiar conduct, in which he will have very few imitators, is more worthy of eulogy than of censure. We can say of him, what St. Jerome said of St. Paul: "His defects would have been virtues in other men." First then, he was averse to precipitation, but, it was virtue and his abundant lights that rendered him so. In matters of business he perceived many folds which escape those who, desiring to hasten affairs, sometimes do a great deal of evil, whilst they think to do good. Hence, he often said: "Nothing seemed to him more common than the bad success of hurried matters." Virtue, also, had a great deal to do with his slowness, or rather, with his maturity of deliberation. He apprehended, as he frequently remarked, "encroaching upon the ways of Providence"—he feared to anticipate the moments fixed by our Lord; he had such low sentiments of himself, and such profound respect for the Supreme Majesty, that he wished God to do all by Himself. God has fully justified the conduct of His servant; and the true children of wisdom have made a suitable defense of it by agreeing that he commenced and finished, in the space of forty years, what a great number of persons could not have accomplished in entire centuries.

The manner in which he spoke of himself on all occasions, contrasts greatly, it is true, with the

conduct of a great many persons. True humility is very rare, and religion has very few virtues which cost more to nature, because there are few that combat that nature and its inclinations, so positively. Vincent possessed this virtue in so eminent a degree, that the Cardinal de la Rochefoucault has often been heard to say, "If one wish to find this virtue upon earth, he should seek for it in this holy Priest." In fine, this faithful imitator of a God annihilated, never lost an opportunity of humbling himself. He saw nothing in himself but the imprint of vice. He conjured his friends to assist him to thank God for the patience with which he supported him, in what he called his infidelities. In one word, he could, with the apostle, discern nothing in himself but a body of misery and sin. He carried his excess no farther, for he cannot be numbered with those melancholy devotees who are generally as discontented with others as with themselves. He closed his eyes to the imperfections of his neighbor, particularly when not responsible for his conduct. He greatly esteemed those virtuous souls who, in the order of charity, always think favorably of their brethren, and who cannot see virtue without praising it, nor virtuous persons without loving them. It was thus he acted himself, yet with discretion; for, if he willingly rejoiced with externs, for the graces God had shed upon them, and for the good use they made of

them, he was more reserved with his own children. He loved them with a paternal tenderness, but he rarely praised them in their presence, unless the glory of God and their own good obliged him to do so. We repeat, then, confidently, that those to whom such holy conduct seems defective, should wish these pretended defects to be multiplied, and should own that they bear a very striking resemblance to the most sublime virtues.

To finish his portraiture, it will suffice to add what we have said elsewhere, that he took Jesus Christ for his model. He drew his morality and whole line of conduct from the Gospel. Those most intimate with him have considered as his peculiar and appropriate device these beautiful words, which an excess of love made him pronounce on a certain occasion: "*Nothing pleases me, but in Jesus Christ.*" Such, according to the judgment of the most respectable and judicious persons of his age, was the founder of the congregation of the mission, and however exalted the idea we here give of him, it will be seen in the sequel of our work, that we have as yet made but a faint attempt at delineating his character.

b. 122

VI.

HIS CHARITY FOR HIS NEIGHBOR.

His life was entirely devoted to doing good to all, as far as he could; who is there that has not experienced the effects of his charity in spiritual and corporal necessities? Can the afflicted person be found, who, having had recourse to him, withdrew without having received some consolation under his pains? He would have considered it a real happiness for himself and for his brethren, to have been reduced by their charities to serve the pastors of villages for sustenance, and even to beg their bread from door to door. "There is no one in the world more obliged to charity than we are," said he to his brethren, "no company should be more given to the exterior exercise of true charity; for our vocation is not to go to one parish alone, or to one diocese, but all over the world, in order to inflame men's hearts, and to accomplish what the Son of God accomplished, who came to cast fire upon the earth, to enkindle His love in the hearts of all mankind. It is true, therefore, that we are the envoys of God, and obliged not only to love him, but to make others

love Him also. It suffices not for us to love God, if our neighbor love Him not also; for we know not how to love our neighbor as ourselves, if we procure not that good for him which we wish for ourselves—namely, Divine love, which unites us to our Sovereign Good. O, my brethren! if we had but one spark of that sacred fire, which inflamed the heart of Jesus Christ, could we remain with our arms crossed? Could we abandon those whom we can assist? Certainly not, for true charity knows not how to remain idle, nor how to see brethren and friends in want, without manifesting love for them. It is the inherent property of fire to enlighten and warm, and of love, to communicate itself."

To confine to just limits, and to treat with some degree of arrangement, a matter so extended, we shall give an outline of his charity for his own children, the sick, the poor, his enemies, the insane, and the foundlings.

He was more of a Father to each one of his brethren, than a natural Father by relationship; there was not one amongst them, who could not, and ought not, to have thought himself tenderly beloved by Vincent. His words and instructions, even his reprimands, bore the impress of charity. He foresaw their necessities, encouraged them amidst difficulties, supported them under hardships, consoled them in afflictions, and condemned no one without a hearing. Artful

insinuations, captious questionings, adroit and cunning slander, had no access to him. He combatted these dangerous vices wherever he met them. He compared detraction to a furious wolf that ravages the fold into which it enters; the very shadow of this unhappy fault alarmed him. The fear that his children might yield to this defect, made him give them seven successive conferences on slander, and he desired that they should speak on it in turn. "It is the property of charity," said he to them, "to cover the faults of the neighbor. Recall these words of the Holy Spirit: 'Hast thou heard a word against thy neighbor, let it die within thee.' The congregation of the Mission will last as long as charity shall reign in it. Cursed be those in it, who destroy this virtue, for they would thereby cause the ruin of the company."

In his discourses, he frequently reverted to the obligation of mutual charity. He said: "This virtue is the soul of all others and the paradise of communities. Paradise is nothing else but a place of love, union and charity. The house of St. Lazarus will be a paradise, if charity be found in it. The chief happiness in eternal life consists in loving the blessed are incessantly absorbed in beatific love. In fine, there is nothing more consoling than to live with those we love, and by whom we are loved. Christian love surpasses all other species of love; by it, a person loves his brethren in God, according to God, and for God; loving

them for the same end for which God loves all men, that is to say, to make them holy in this world, and most happy in the other. A man who wishes to live without charity in a community, will be, on seeing so many inclinations and actions discordant with his own, like a vessel which, without anchor or rudder in the midst of rocks, is wafted at the sport of the waves and winds, that, assailing it on all sides, make a wreck of it."

Vincent reduced these maxims to practice. Every one of his children, even the least perfect, had free access to him. When they went to him to speak of their particular necessities, or on any other subject, he received them with great affability. As he knew that he would not have been what he then was but for them, he would listen to them by the hour.

One of his priests acknowledged to him that he had sentiments of aversion for him. At these words, the holy Priest rising, embraced him affectionately, congratulated him on his sincerity, and said to him: "If I had not already given you my heart, I would give it wholly to you instantly." Another, disgusted with his vocation, told him that he wished to return to his own country. "When do you purpose going," said the servant of God, "and will you travel on foot, or on horseback?" The priest, who had spoken seriously, and who had expected lengthy and warm discussions, was so struck with these few words, and the manner, full of be-

nignity, with which they were pronounced, that he was instantly relieved from his temptation.—This confirmed the Saint in his principle, that a grain of charity suffices to calm inquietudes, and to adjust differences completely.

A brother whom the demon of disgust for his vocation had been disturbing for a long time, wrote to the Saint several times to entreat him to approve of his leaving the company. "No, my brother," Vincent replied, "I know not how to consent to your leaving, because it is not the will of God, and you would thereby endanger your soul, which is very dear to me. If you will not believe me, at least, I pray you to leave the congregation at the same door by which you entered it. This door is a spiritual retreat, which I beseech you to make before you to come to any determination on an affair of such great importance. Choose one of our three houses nearest the place where you are, and be assured you will be well received anywhere. The goodness of your heart has gained all the affection of mine; and my affection has no other object in view save the glory of God and your sanctification."

There is no duty more difficult to discharge than that of fraternal correction, because it requires, in him who performs it, the principal virtues of Christianity. Good example ought to precede it, for could one delinquent admonish another with good grace? Certainly not; unquestionably, it would be said to

him, "*Physician heal thyself.*" Patience should prevent precipitation in giving reproof, because, as it is the last remedy, no one should have recourse to it till all others have failed. Charity should administer it with its own hands, as it were, because, otherwise, in wishing to cure the wound, there is danger of making new ones. Humility should accompany it, because, a man who is the first to accuse himself of his defects, seems the farthest removed from all pharisaical pride and diminishes the confusion of him whose infirmities he discovers. Prudence should direct it, because it is necessary not to deject such as easily lose courage, nor embitter those minds whose haughty temperament disposes to revolt; yet, who can, however, if well managed, be turned to account. Sweetness should temper it, because there is question of using a remedy, of which nature has a horror, and against which it will, at first, rebel, unless care be taken to beguile and lull it. Nevertheless, correction should be forcible, because it should strike to the root of the evil; the spiritual physician should therefore regard it as the last resource. This kind of correction, requiring so many precautions, Vincent gave with great success, observing faithfully the following rules.

As a general thing, he did not at once reprimand those who had committed a fault, for he feared that nature might have a share in so sudden an admonition, whereas he wished that it should

be dictated by charity alone. He considered, in the presence of God, the dispositions of the guilty one, and how to render the correction salutary. Being thus disposed, and finding himself obliged to give a reprimand to a person who thought little of faults, but who chafed under admonition, he prepared himself by prayer during three days, and begged God to give him the light of which he had need, to govern rightly a man so difficult to direct. He began by giving proof of his esteem for those he wished to correct, and would even praise their good qualities. Sometimes, he would excuse them, attributing their faults to the first movement of a nature which was not well restrained. Afterwards, however, he made them feel the full extent of the fault they had committed. He recalled to their minds the circumstances, person, time, place, and so on. This detail was followed by the remedy, and that this might be better received, the Saint would take on himself a part of the fault. "My dear Sir," he would say, "we have need, both you and I, to labor to acquire humility, to practice patience, to bear with others as we would wish them to bear with us, and to accustom ourselves to regularity." It rarely happened that any one to whom he had unburdened his heart quitted him without an increase of esteem and love. He was looked upon less as a judge who punishes the transgression of the laws, than as a father who pardons, and teaches how the fault may be avoided

in future. Each one, at leaving him, acknowledged, with the wise man, that the wounds inflicted by a sincere friend are more desirable than the deceitful embraces of an enemy; but the gentleness with which he tempered the remedy went not so far as to weaken and render it useless. He gave full efficacy to it, as can be seen in a letter he wrote to a young regent in a seminary. "I believe, my dear Sir, what you tell me, rather than what I see, for I have too many proofs of your desire for the good of the seminary, to question it. Nevertheless, I entreat you to reflect upon your way of acting, and, with the grace of God, to correct what is unbecoming, for, besides the offense offered to His Divine Majesty, other unpleasant consequences may ensue. First, these discontented gentlemen who leave the seminary, having conceived a disgust for virtue, may fall into vice, and lose their souls on account of having left a holy school too soon, simply because they were not treated kindly in it. The second is, that they will decry the seminary, and hinder others from entering it, who would otherwise go there to receive the instructions and graces suited to their vocation. In the third place, the bad teacher in one particular house, reflects on the credit of the little company, which, losing a great share of its good reputation, receives a notable prejudice in its functions, and sees that good diminishing which God had designed that it should effect. If you say that you have not remarked in

yourself this harshness, this bitterness which re pulses your pupils, it is a sign that you have very little humility, for, if you had as much as our Lord demands of a priest of the Mission, you would think yourself the most imperfect of all, and would consider it a secret delusion that you do not see in yourself the faults that others discern, especially since you have been informed of them. With reference to admonition, they tell me that you can hardly endure it. If this be so, O, my dear Sir, how fearful is your state, and how far removed from that of the saints, who humbled themselves before all mankind, and rejoiced when any one pointed out to them the smallest defect. It is badly imitating Jesus Christ, the Saint of Saints. He permitted himself to be publicly reproached with the evil he had not done, and said not one word to deliver Himself from His confusion. Let us learn of Him, my dear Sir, to be meek and humble of heart. These are the virtues that you and I ought continually to beg of Him, and to which we ought to pay very particular attention, lest we permit ourselves to yield to the contrary passions, which destroy with one hand the spiritual edifice built by the other."

It cost him more to give than to receive a painful admonition. "It lacerates my very heart," he said, in one of his letters, "to say the least thing which can afflict you." The letters in which the servant of God gave the most serious advice,

were generally concluded with some remarks calculated to console them, and re-animate their courage. He would say that God had permitted their faults not only to humble them, but to give them an opportunity of laboring more efficaciously for their salvation. He would even go so far as to excuse himself for the frankness with which he had spoken his sentiments,—in fine, he attacked pride with so much address that without having felt itself wounded, it would die,—hence it was that some one said, very pleasantly, to one of his brethren, "Vincent resembles the Grand Seignior*, since he strangles self-love with silken cords."

The Saint was always attentive to two things — first, never to make known who had given him information of any irregularity, secondly, that he and his representatives should not be too sensible of faults concerning themselves. Regarding the first point, he would have preferred to leave the guilty one unpunished, rather than to give him reason to mistrust any one, because he was persuaded that in communities union and peace are blessings to which all others must yield. Respecting faults which reflect on the person of the superior, although such are always of an aggravated nature, he wished that the superior, on such occasions, should arm himself with patience, as the stronger should support the faults of the weaker, and that

* The Sultan.

he should give the offenders time to acknowledge their errors, recalling them to their duty by discretion and charity. "I participate in the difficulties you experience," said he to a superior, "and look upon them as little trials our Lord has sent you to teach you how to direct well the persons committed to your care. It should enable you to discern how great was the goodness of our Lord in supporting the defects of His apostles and disciples when He was with them on earth, and how much He had to suffer from the good and the wicked. Besides, it will make you see that dignified stations have thorns, as well as others, and that those superiors who wish to do their duty have much to suffer. Therefore, my dear Sir, let us give ourselves to God to serve Him in our office without desiring any human gratification."

However, as there are some evils that neither patience nor good management can remedy, and which are contagious in community life, Vincent did not always wish the superior to preserve silence, although the matter concerned only himself. He obliged him to speak, but under these restrictions—that it should never be without pressing necessity, on the spur of the moment, that it should be in a kind manner, and at a proper time, in fine, that he should so reason that the delinquent may have a feeling sense of the inconveniences that his conduct causes, and that he may discern that his superior does not reprehend him through

interested motives, or through humo but for his own good, and for the good of the community. To these precautions, the servant of God joined yet another, well suited to sustain them, and to enable superiors to be so circumspect in their expressions, that their inferiors might not be offended by the reprimands given them. He recommended to those who were in office, that they should never inform their brethren of the defects they remark in them, without having first requested them to exercise a like charity in their regard. He was persuaded that a superior, however wise he may be, always commits many faults, not only in his charge, but in the performance of his duty as a Christian, and that nothing is more efficacious than to be the first to receive a service, however repugnant to nature, from him to whom he feels bound to exercise a like charity. Although these precautions in giving reprimands seem almost excessive, Vincent was not always contented with them. He would confine himself to reproving a fault in a general manner, whenever he feared that a private admonition would either embitter or afflict too sensibly. He acted thus, when the fault was so inveterate, that a private admonition would prove useless to the guilty party, and when there was danger that others might follow the bad example, if no reproof were given; and also, when minds were so weak that they could not bear correction, however gently given, though otherwise

well disposed. "Because," said he, "a recommendation, in which no one is designated, suffices to the correction of a man whose heart is not bad. In other cases I prefer that the reprehension be made in private, at first sweetly, then with more severity, and afterwards with a firmness which announces the last remedy."

Although his charity was at all times lively, it redoubled towards the sick. Far from regarding them as burdens, he used to say that the sick are a blessing to the houses where they are. He gave express orders to ensure their being treated well, and furnished with such food and remedies as they required. He did not leave them entirely to the care of his officers. He visited the infirm and learned from themselves how they were treated. Fearing that timidity might prevent them from speaking, he himself would see how they were served, and was never content unless they had reason to be so. He sent those to watering places to whom he thought it would prove salutary, or else prescribed such journeys as would tend to reinvigorate them,—in a word, he did for them all that a charitable heart could do. He treated novices, when ill, with a like attention, and forgot nothing that might re-establish their health. He thus gained some excellent subjects for his congregation. When the sick became convalescent, he would amuse them by relating things of a nature to enliven and instruct, for the care which he

bestowed on the body was so well ordered that the soul experienced no loss. "He gently and paternally exhorted those whose sickness was not violent, never to omit their spiritual exercises, for fear that the infirmity of the body might pass into the soul, and render it tepid and imperfect."—*Abelly, in his life of the Saint.*

If the conduct of the saints were measured by common rules, we would find more than one occasion wherein the man of God seemed to carry his charity beyond bounds. More than once, he exposed his health, his goods and even his life, to serve the sick. His charity once caused him to run a great risk, some time after he had taken possession of the house of St. Lazarus, for, a contagious disease having broken out in it, the subprior of the old religious was attacked. As soon as the holy priest was informed of this he went to console him, and to offer his services, and would have passed days and nights with him, notwithstanding his infectious breath, if he had not been prevented. A young man at St. Lazarus having been seized with the same malady, although some persons wished to have him taken to the hospital of St. Louis, Vincent would not permit it, but gave orders that particular care should be taken of him. He was often heard to say, with St. Benedict: "Even the sacred vessels should be sold rather than to leave the sick unassisted."

From childhood till death, nearly all of Vin-

cent's life was spent in relieving the miserable. So many charitable associations, so many tears for foundlings, so many hospitals, so many succors bestowed on immense provinces, so many large sums distributed among the slaves in Barbary, and among the Christians of Mount Lebanon so many glorious establishments still subsisting, prove even now, after the lapse of a century, that the spirit of mercy was ever his actuating principle. It was for the poor that he established the Daughters of Charity, and they glory in being their servants. It was for the poor that he gave a new congregation of holy priests to the church. "We are the priests of the poor," said he to them, "God has chosen us principally for them, the rest is only accessory." In truth, it is thought that he was almost always occupied with the poor and the afflicted, they were his treasures and the objects of all his affection. He felt their sufferings deeply, and nothing afflicted him more than to be unable to relieve them. He even anticipated their sufferings, and suffered for them in advance. One day, during a severe winter, he said to one of his brethren: "What will the poor do, and whither will they go? I acknowledge that they are my grief and my burden. I am told the poor in the country say that they can live while they have fruit, but after that they may make their trenches and bury themselves alive. O God! what an extremity of misery, and by what means can it be remedied?"

The sight of the poor—the mere mention of them made such an impression on his heart that it manifested itself in his exterior. He was affected whenever he pronounced these words in the Litany: "Jesus father of the poor, *Jesu pater pauperum.*" Notwithstanding his self-possession, as soon as he was told of any great distress of a family, or of a single individual, the expression of his countenance would betoken the grief with which he was penetrated. It would have been the consummation of affliction to him if he had seen his brethren appear insensible to the miseries of the poor. He endeavored to prevent their becoming unmindful of them by words full of faith and reason. "God loves the poor," would he say to them, "and, consequently, He loves those that love the poor, for, when we feel an affection for any one, we feel it for his friends and servants. Now, as our little company applies itself to serve the poor with affection, who are the beloved of God, we have reason to hope that for love of them, God will love us. Go then, my brethren, let us employ ourselves with renewed ardor in serving the poor, and let us seek out the most abandoned and acknowledge before God that they are our lords and masters. . . . All those that love the poor during life will see death approach without fear. I have seen the truth of this exemplified on many occasions Hence, I am accustomed to insinuate this truth into the minds of persons whom I find

to have great fears of death, and in this way, I take occasion to excite them to love the poor." The sweet and tranquil manner in which Vincent himself slept in the Lord, proves what he had advanced on this subject. Although he had the heart of a father for his children, yet, he seemed to love them only on account of their relationship to the poor, and he loved the poor only with reference to God. He once said to his brethren: "Let us not allow the complaint to apply to us, which our Lord formerly made by His prophet: "I looked for one who would grieve together with me, and I found none. *Sustinui qui simul mecum contristaretur, et non fuit.*" . . . . . Let us think how much we stand in need of mercy, we who ought to exercise it towards others, suffering everything through compassion. Happy are our brethren in Poland, who have suffered so much during the late wars and pestilence. . . . . Happy missionaries, whom cannon, fire-arms, and the plague, have not been able to drive from Warsaw, where the wretchedness of their neighbor keeps them. O! how happy are they in employing so well this moment of life. Yes, this *moment*, for our whole life is but a moment which vanishes instantly. Alas! I have passed nearly eighty years, but they seem to me now only as a dream, and nothing remains to me from them, but regret for having employed them so badly. Let us reflect what disquietude will be ours at death, if we do

not make use of this moment to exercise deeds of mercy."

The holy priest repeated the same lesson to his brethren on a thousand occasions. He wished that mercy should become so familiar to them, that on seeing them people would say: "Behold the men of mercy." Hence, he insisted that they should weep with those who weep, and that they should share in all the sufferings of the poor, and, in fine, that they should be careful to solace them in all their misery: "Because," said he, "the hand ought to conform, as far as it can, to the sentiments of the heart." In works of mercy, he enforced by example, what he had taught by words. He has been known to give even the last farthing and to expose his house to want even necessaries, lest the *poor* should suffer. We have known him to relinquish, in favor of the indigent, more than half a million, which had been offered to him to build a church, but this perfect disinterestedness did not satisfy his charity. After having exhausted his own means, and drawn from his friends all that prudence and proper consideration permitted, he had recourse to the Queen, and, although his knowledge of the pious prodigality of this august princess prevented him from often importuning her, she was always his refuge in his greatest exigencies and never failed him. If she had no money, as sometimes happened, she would give him some of her jewels, as she had learned from

him to regard them only as so many trifles. She did more, for, fearing to lose the fruit of her generous deeds, she entreated Vincent not to speak of them. In this, Anne of Austria imitated the servant of God, who concealed from the public most of the alms which he gave. His precautions were, however, sometimes in vain. Every day, and the practice has been faithfully continued by his successors, Vincent received two poor persons at St. Lazarus, who, in turn, were succeded by two others, until the twelve, whose names were on his roll, had been served. Vincent gave them dinner, and had them served before the Community; he waited on them himself, and because they were, then as now, infirm old men, often assisted them up the stairs leading to the refectory. On Holy Thursday, he assembled all of them, washed their feet and served them at table after giving them alms. Every day, without counting the beggars that came to the door, all of whom received something, he distributed provisions to some poor families, who sent for them at set hours. The holy man, who always placed the necessities of the soul before every other, would instruct the poor, whom he assembled to receive alms, in the mysteries of faith, on the blessings and dangers of poverty, the means of sanctifying themselves in it, the merit of patience and the solid happiness of those, who, without losing peace of heart, live and die amid sufferings. He extended his charity to foreigners, and thought

of those who thought not of him. A priest and one of the brothers, by his order visited the garrets, to find out their wretched inmates, whom pride or want of friends had consigned to those abodes of misery. By this means he became acquainted with the situation of a considerable number of Catholics, who, in order not to lose their faith by staying in Ireland, had exposed themselves to die of famine in Paris. The Saint rendered signal service to the Irish nation, as celebrated for its attachment to the faith of its forefathers, as for the long and cruel tyranny which, on this account, it has endured.

An old soldier, who had received so many wounds in war, as to merit the sirname of "Riddle," came to St. Lazarus, where no one knew him. He said to the holy priest, in a rough voice, but with a gentle manner, "I have heard, Sir, that you are a very charitable man, will you be so kind as to receive me into your house for some time?" The saint willingly consented. Two days after, this soldier fell sick,—Vincent removed him to an apartment in which there was a fire, gave him a brother to wait on him, and without sparing either remedies or nourishing food, kept him until he was recovered. Was the Samaritan, mentioned in the Gospel, more charitable?

A man so filled with charity for his neighbor, ought not to have enemies; he had fewer than most people, yet, the necessity of protecting the property

of his congregation, and still more, his firmness in the Council of Conscience, raised up some. A disciple of the Savior, he should not be more favored than his Master, and like his Divine Model, he gave to the world the example of a virtue whose practice is the most rare. A person of quality, who had testified much affection for him, showed him great coldness on several occasions. Vincent, not knowing to what this sudden change might be attributed, paid this old friend a visit to discover. "My dear Sir," he said, accosting him with a serene countenance, "I am so unfortunate as to have given you some dissatisfaction, though quite undesignedly, and as I do not know in what way, I have come to entreat you to tell me, so that if I am in fault, I may make amends." "It is true," replied the lord, already softened by the Saint's openness and sincerity, "it is true, Mr. Vincent, that on such an occasion—your conduct displeased me a little." The servant of God had no difficulty in disabusing one whom false reports had deceived, and so fully justified himself, that the nobleman esteemed him more than ever.

The holy man returned good for evil. A powerful Order opposed what Alexander VII. had confirmed to the institute of the Mission, under a very important head. Vincent was surprised, because he had rendered very important services to the order which now sought to thwart his design, nevertheless, he contented himself with saying to a friend.

"I learn that the —— are opposed to us, but if they were even to tear out our eyes, I would not cease to love, respect and serve them, during all my life, and I hope that God will enable me to do so." God heard his prayer, for the order, of which we have been speaking, never had a more zealous friend or defender than he proved to be.

A gentleman, of high birth, solicited the court for a benefice. Vincent, however, made it evident to all the council that he was unworthy of this favor and spoke with such force that he induced the members to agree that it should not be bestowed on him. Some days after, as he was entering the Louvre, the disappointed Lord attacked him in public and ill-treated him. The Saint had but one word to say to be avenged, but he entered the council and retired from it without having mentioned his adventure; yet it had been too public to remain secret long. The Queen learned it and, justly incensed at having a person whom she honored with her confidence, insulted in her palace, gave orders that this Lord should withdraw, and appear no more at court. Vincent hearing of this did for a declared enemy what he would hardly have done for his best friend. He demanded his pardon with so many importunities, that although the Queen Regent was not easily changed from her purpose, he pressed the matter in so urgent a manner and so frequently, that she was obliged at last to yield to his solicitations.

On taking possession of St. Lazarus, the Saint had taken charge of three or four insane persons, who had been confided to the care of Mr. Le Bon, the worthy prior that established Vincent and his Missionaries in his priory, that he might share in the great recompense which their labors in the church merited. With what attention Vincent had these poor insane people served!—even waiting on them himself. He attached himself to their interests the more willingly as nature found less satisfaction therein. On the eve of being turned from St. Lazarus, by the opposition offered by a religious order, possessed of much credit and of many friends, the servant of God examined one day in the presence of God, as he declared to some persons in confidence, what would give him most pain, if obliged to quit this new abode, at once so commodious and so advantageous to his congregation. He found nothing that would affect him more sensibly, than to be obliged to quit these poor insane persons. The service which he renderd to Jesus Christ in their persons, was nearer to his heart, than was a manorial mansion at the entrance of the city of Paris. He valued this service as a treasure which he feared to lose, while it would have cost him no pain to have been despoiled of the valuable property which he was just beginning to enjoy. He said with the apostle, that to become wise according to God, we must choose that which is reputed foolishness before men. It was in this spirit, that

after having become the peaceful possessor of the house of St. Lazarus, the Saint continued always to extend his tender charity to these poor insane persons, whom the world had cast off, and with whose care no one else would charge himself. He looked upon them as infirm members of our Lord, and in that character rendered them all the corporal and spiritual assistance in his power. In accordance with his principles, which inclined him to take more especial care of the most abandoned amongst the poor, he applied himself with singular affection to the relief of foundlings. His love was the more tender for those innocent creatures, as they are the less capable of aiding themselves. "Is it not the duty of fathers," said he, one day, to his brethren, "to provide for the necessities of their children? Since God has substituted us, then, for those who were the authors of their being, that we may take care to preserve their lives, and to rear them in the knowledge of the things of salvation, let us be on our guard, lest we relax in an undertaking so agreeable to Him; for, if after their unnatural mothers have exposed and abandoned them, we neglect to provide for their nourishment and education, what will become of them? Can we consent to see them perish in this great city of Paris, as others have in former times?"

In truth, this city enclosed in its limits every kind of extreme; luxury and wealth went side by side with misery and indigence; virtue and crime,

theatrical representations and penitential tears, the most austere purity of manners and the most unrestrained libertinism. Licentiousness, or poverty gave birth yearly to a vast number of children, who, in the time of our holy priest, lost their lives before being conscious of their existence, or else only knew of it, to experience all its misfortunes. Their mothers more jealous of honor than of virtue, and desirous of preserving the appearance of both, very often sacrificed them on the very day they brought them into the world. They exposed them at the entrance of churches, or else in the public places. It is true, that the commissioners took them away by order of the police, but this first succor was almost the only service rendered them. They were carried to a widow in St. Landry street, who, with two servants, had the care of rearing them, but, as the number of these children was very great, and the alms received for them very small, this widow, not having a sufficient income, could not engage a sufficient number of nurses for those that were not weaned, nor to bring up those that were. Therefore, the greater number of these unfortunate children died from want of attention. It often happened, indeed, that the servants, in order to be freed from their importunate cries, gave them a sleeping draft which shortened their lives. Those that escaped this danger, were given to whoever wished to take them, or sold at so low a price as to be purchased for twenty pence.

The rest were not taken care of through compassion, but were nursed by sickly women whose diseased milk communicated to them contagion and death; others were substituted in the place of children that nurses had been hired to foster, but that had died through their neglect. It is known that several were butchered, either to serve for magical operations, or for those baths of blood to which the desire of life made some persons resort. What was still more deplorable, was that those who had not received baptism died without it, the widow of St. Landry having acknowledged that she had never baptized any, nor had them baptized.—*Choisy, in his life of Madam de Miramion, page* 140.

The unfortunate, wretched situation of these foundlings touched the heart of the holy man. The difficulty was how to apply a remedy. Vincent was charitable enough to attempt it, and was so happy as to succeed. He entreated the Ladies of the Assembly, of which we speak in chapter XXII., to go to "*the lying-in house*," which was the name of that occupied by the widow, to endeavor to put a stop to so great an evil, or at least diminish it. These ladies, dismayed at the spectacle presented by so large a number of abandoned children, took some of them, at once, in order to save their lives, as they could not take charge of all. To honor the designs of Providence, of which they were ignorant, they drew lots for

twelve of them. They hired a house at the gate St. Victor, to receive them, and Mademoiselle Le Gras, who entered into all the good works of her director, took care of them, with her Daughters of Charity. They tried, at first, to nourish them with the milk of goats or cows; but in the end, gave them nurses. The difference which soon appeared between those lodged at the gate St. Victor, and those which remained at St. Landry's excited much compassion for the latter; but it was impossible to adopt them all. However, they prayed God to manifest His designs, to open the treasure of His mercy, and to facilitate the success of an enterprise which appeared not less necessary than difficult.

Finally, after many prayers and conferences, they convened a general assembly early in the year 1640. The Saint set forth in so pathetic a manner the necessities of these innocent creatures, the glory which would redound to God from the Christian education they could give them, the blessings and recompense that would follow such a good work, that all the ladies formed the resolution to take charge of the poor children. The servant of God, being as prudent as he was zealous, knew well that the necessary addition to the twelve or fourteen thousand pounds which was all they had at their immediate command, would be a very immense sum, and desired them to undertake nothing except by way of experiment. Thus he

prevented those virtuous ladies from having any reason to repent of too eagerly acting on the impulse.

Besides the money which, according to his custom, he furnished himself, he represented the extremely wretched situation of these poor exposed children to Anna of Austria, and by her protection obtained from the King a rent of twelve thousand pounds upon five large farms. With this help the establishment was sustained during several years; but the apprehension of a revolution in the State, which murmurs and factions seemed to threaten, the daily increasing number of these children, whose support already cost upwards of forty thousand pounds,—all these considerations finally diminished the courage of these Ladies of Charity. They resolutely declared that such great expenses surpassed their means, and that they could no longer sustain them. It was to come to a final decision, in this, so important an affair, that Vincent convened a general assembly in 1648. The Ladies, de Merillac, de Fraversai, de Miramion, and others, whose names are written in the Book of Life were present; the Saint proposed for their deliberation the good work they had commenced. He set forth the reasons for and against its continuance. On one side, he represented to the ladies that they had contracted no obligation, but were free to act as they judged most expedient; on the other, he reminded them that, by their charitable

care, they had already preserved the lives of a very great number of children, who, otherwise, would have been lost for time, and perhaps for eternity; that these innocents, in learning to speak, had learned to know and serve God; that some of them had begun to work, and to be no longer a burden to any one; that these happy commencements presaged still more pleasing results. The holy man, no longer able to control his sighs, or his words, took a more feeling, animated tone, and concluded in these terms: "Now, Ladies, compassion and charity made you adopt these little creatures as your children; you have been their mothers according to grace, since their natural mothers had abandoned them. See now if you will also abandon them. Cease to be their mothers, to become their judges; their life and their death are in your hands; I shall take the votes; you must pronounce their sentence, and decide whether or not you will have farther compassion on them. They will live if you will continue your charitable care of them; otherwise, they will infallibly perish and die, if you abandon them; experience permits not that you should doubt it."

At these words, which were deemed by a great master of eloquence in those times, worthy of much eulogy, the assembly could only respond by its tears. The unction of the Holy Spirit had penetrated all hearts, all Israel was but as one person by uniformity of mind. It was decreed that they

would continue what had been so well commenced, cost what it might. The deliberation was no longer upon the subsistence of the enterprise, it turned only on the means of executing it; in consequence of a resolution so worthy of those who formed it, they asked and obtained of the King the old castle buildings of Bicetre, which were constructed in the reign of Charles V. by order of John Duke de Berri, and had been fitted up as a hospital for invalid soldiers, under Louis XIII. The children that no longer needed nurses were transferred to that place, but as it was soon evident that the air was too sharp for them, they were removed to the suburbs of Paris, near Saint Lazarus, where ten or twelve Daughters of Charity took charge of their education. The ladies purchased two houses afterwards, one in the suburb Saint-Antoine, where the Queen-Mother laid the corner-stone of a church; the other, before the Hotel-Dieu, and quite near the Cathedral. Their revenues were greatly augmented in the course of time, by the liberality of Louis XIV. But the number of children increased so much more rapidly than their revenues, that fifty thousand pounds sufficed not for their support, as we read in the work of the Abbe de Choisy, written seventy years ago. What would he have said at the present time, when misery and dissoluteness multiply their numbers to an almost infinite degree. It is to be hoped that time, which

effaces by degrees the remembrance of ordinary benefits, will never be able to make the foundlings forget the signal service which Vincent rendered them, that their lisping tongues will not be loosed without chanting his name, and that, sensible of the benefits of the Christian Education which his Daughters in Jesus Christ have given them, they will, from age to age, exclaim: Those who gave me life, have abandoned me; I would have been subject to the same cruel fate of so many others, had not God, by the instrumentality of a tender and charitable servant, taken me under His protection, and His liberal hand given me much more than I had lost; and with the prophet: "My Father and my Mother have forsaken me; but the Lord hath taken me up. *Pater meus et mater mea dereliquerunt me, Dominus autem assumpsit me.*"

VII.

ST. VINCENT'S CHARITY FOR THE POOR GALLEY SLAVES.

Although the great object of Vincent's zeal was the necessities of the poor peasants, it stopped not there. Everything bearing the impress of wretchedness belonged to his province. He needed neither solicitation nor importunity; he went in quest of the miserable; he made haste to console those who had never thought of imploring his aid. Hardly had he returned from his missions, than, as if to refresh himself after the fatigues attached to so painful a ministry, he visited the hospitals and prisons, and rendered to the prisoners and the sick all the services in his power. As his special inclination was always in favor of such as had the most wounds to cure, he wished to know how the galley-slaves were treated, who remained in Paris some time before being taken to Marseilles. He penetrated the dungeons of the prison where he had expected to find much misery, but found more than he had anticipated. He saw, in short, wretched beings confined in dark, gloomy dens, "eaten up with vermin, debilitated from weakness and destitution, and entirely neglected both corporally and spiritually."—*Abelly.*

Treatment so opposed to the principles of Christianity deeply touched the holy priest. He judged, and correctly, that the remedy of so great an evil would cost much; on one side, he felt anxious to comfort so large a number of miserable beings; on the other, it was necessary to ameliorate their condition without endangering justice; to inspire them with the fear of the judgments of God, although they had never yet thought on those judgments; to teach their hardened hearts to sanctify, by love and patience, those very sufferings which exasperated them, and which were immediate and continual occasions of blasphemy and despair. Happy was it for them that Vincent knew no difficulty when there was question of procuring the glory of God, and the relief of the afflicted. Whilst still under strong emotions excited by the sad objects he had seen, he informed Mr. de Gondi, General of the Galleys, of their state; he represented that these criminals were dependent on him, and that whilst waiting to have them conducted to their destination, charity demanded that they should not be left without consolation. He proposed a means of rendering them spiritual and corporal assistance. Mr. de Gondi approved it, and gave the servant of God full power to execute it.

The holy man hired a house in suburb St. Ho norius, and assembled there all the convicts that were scattered through the city in the different

prisons. As this good work had no other support than Divine Providence, he put such of his friends as were able to defray the expenses, under contribution. The Archbishop of Paris entering into his views, by a mandate of the 1st of June, 1618, enjoined that the curates, vicars, and preachers of the city should exhort the people to aid in so holy an enterprise. The exertions of Vincent de Paul were not fruitless, his example was followed by many, and he saw himself in a condition, after having partially remedied their sad state corporally, to undertake the care of their spiritual wounds. The Saint frequently visited the galley-slaves, and spoke to them of God in a strong, forcible, yet, gentle manner. He instructed them on the truths of Faith, and their own obligations. He made them sensible that although their sufferings were not voluntary, yet they could accept them in a manner that would render them meritorious. He added that perfect resignation, would diminish their bitterness, and that there are really no true pains but such as deservedly punish the impenitent in eternity.

This discourse made a great impression on men unaccustomed to hear of such things, and whom good treatment had rendered docile. Evident signs of sincere grief were manifested, and in the course of time, general confessions completed what these exhortations had commenced. Vincent had the consolation of seeing men who had forgotten God

during many years, approach the holy mysteries with a fear mingled with love and gratitude, and with dispositions suited to persons already advanced in virtue.

A change, which so clearly indicated the powerful Hand of the Most High, added much to our Saint's honor in Paris, and at court. No one could divine how one man could obtain support for so many, by what address he had captivated minds which were naturally so untractable, nor where he had found strength to sustain himself, without a moment's repose, amidst so many, and such different and painful duties. In fact, the holy priest passed his days for some time with the convicts, and rendered them every kind of service. The contagious diseases which sometimes attacked them did not repel him; he even shut himself up with them, in order to be better able to console and relieve them. When other duties of his charge called him elsewhere, he left them to the care of two ecclesiastics, who having been fostered under his shadow, were filled with his spirit. They lodged in this new convict-hospital, celebrated mass, and watered daily the seed so happily sown by our Saint. Vincent left them alone as little as possible; his treasure was in the midst of this newly cultivated soil; his heart called him thither constantly.

Mr. de Gondi, equally surprised and edified at the fine order Vincent had established amongst

persons who had never known what it was before, formed a design of introducing the same by his help into all the galleys of the Kingdom. He gave the King an exalted idea of the Saint's capacity and zeal, and convinced him that if the Court would give the holy man the power, he would not fail to do the same good in many places, that he had already effected in Paris. Louis XIII. readily assented to a proposition so just, and by a letter patent of the 8th of February, 1619, appointed Vincent general almoner or chaplain of all the galleys. The Saint was confirmed in this dignity twenty-five years later, at the solicitation of the Duke de Richelieu, who succeeded Mr. de Gondi, as General of the Galleys.

In 1622, Vincent went to Marseilles to aid the convicts. This name alone presents to the mind the idea of a vast number of wretches, who detest nothing of the crime but the punishment it entails; whom excess of severity renders insolent and furious, and who think to indemnify themselves for the bad treatment they receive from men, by their blasphemies against God, in fine, who seem in some sort like the angels of darkness, that God punishes with so much rigor, for change of place and climate alters not their state, since they carry their prison, their chains, and bad dispositions with them everywhere. On entering these floating prisons, enough was seen to be able to form some idea of Hell—in them was to be found

a set of wretches, suffering and despairing, who pronounced the name of God as demons do, only to blaspheme it, who redoubled their tortures by cursing the chastening Hand of God; and who were more heavily weighed down by their sins than by their chains. At a spectacle which should touch those whom it could not surprise, the holy man was deeply moved; but his was not a mere sterile compassion. He went from rank to rank, like a good father, who feels, as a matter of course, all that his tenderly loved children suffer. He patiently listened to their complaints, wept with those that wept, kissed their chains, and bathed them with his tears; as far as he possibly could, he joined alms to his words, and thus found entrance into their hearts. He spoke also to the officers, and committees, and engaged them to treat these men, already suffering enough, with more humanity. His cares were not unavailing—more humanity was shown on one side, more docility on the other. A peaceful spirit insinuated itself by degrees, murmurings were appeased, their ordinary chaplains could speak of God without being interrupted, and it become evident that some of the convicts were susceptible of virtuous impressions.

Vincent was too much pleased with this first essay not to push his conquest farther. He gave a mission to the galley-slaves; it was the more necessary at a time, when heresy, which is timid only long enough to concert means to be-

come furious with impunity, was then ever ready to revolt whether on land or water. The Saint selected twenty of the best evangelical laborers he could find in Bourdeaux, whither Mr. de Gondi had conducted ten galleys; he sent these Fathers two by two, to each galley. As for himself, he was everywhere. He gained a Mahometan to God, and this poor Turk was so sensible and grateful for the grace which the holy man had procured him, that he honored him as his father. Vincent had the consolation of seeing a great number of the galley-slaves sincerely converted.

The holy priest returned to Paris, to try to bring back to God the convicts he had placed at St. Roche's. They occupied only a hired house, and could be dismissed under various pretexts. Vincent, who was accustomed to provide against all exigences that he could foresee, judged it necessary, and with good reason, to have them sent to an hospital, in which they might dwell permanently. He addressed himself to the King, who consented that an old tower, which is between St Bernard's gate and the river, should become a retreat for these wretched beings. The care of their spiritual and temporal welfare devolved almost entirely on Vincent for several years. He ordered his priests, who remained at the College des Bons-Enfans, to visit these criminals frequently, say mass for them daily, hear their confessions, and console them. Mademoiselle Le Gras,

always attentive when he sought to induce her to listen to maxims of charity and active in reducing them to practice, assisted him by her alms. Vincent animated other persons of rank by this pious widow's example, to contribute to the good work, and to visit the Son of God suffering for our sins, in the persons of these poor men suffering for their own crimes. But the holy Priest defrayed most of the expenses himself, and so it was to him, principally, that the galley-slaves were indebted for lodging and support. At last, Providence afforded them assistance proportioned to their wants. A virtuous person bequeathed them on his death-bed, a legacy of six thousand pounds yearly.

It was resolved that the temporal administration of this particular hospital should be given in perpetuity to the Procurator General, that the Daughters of Charity should serve these poor wretches, particularly those that might fall sick, and that the priests of the parish of St. Nicholas-du-Chardonnet should have a yearly stipend of three hundred pounds as long as they should be faithful in rendering them those spiritual services which the priests of the Missions had hitherto rendered. It was not without some opposition that this last article passed, as it seemed that the parish priests were bound to serve the convicts since they had become their parishioners; it was at last agreed to, at the request of Vincent de Paul,

who represented that so heavy a charge deserved a suitable recompense. The zeal of these virtuous ecclesiastics did not diminish that which Vincent had ever manifested for the salvation of these poor galley-slaves. He gave them missions from time to time, particularly when about being sent to the galleys, when, indeed, they had most need of consolation and of being incited to make a holy use of their sufferings.

His tenderness for them was not confined to what we have already set forth. He solaced them in the very place where they had most to suffer. The sad state to which he saw the sick galley-slaves reduced, at Marseilles, moved him sensibly; wholly abandoned, loaded with chains, overwhelmed with sorrow, almost consumed by decay and infectious diseases, these living corpses, as we might almost call them, already experienced the horrors of the tomb. Vincent could not see without profound emotion, men formed to the image of God, Christians redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, dying like so many brutes. The servant of God addressed himself to the Cardinal de Richelieu, and represented how necessary it was to found an hospital for these poor sick convicts, who were reduced to so pitiable a state. The Cardinal made the proposal find acceptance with the King, and the hospital was built. Louis XIV. later, by letters patent, in 1646-48, assigned twelve thousand pounds yearly, off the salt in Provence,

to this hospital, which soon became one of the most commodious in the Kingdom. It contained three hundred beds. The sick were served by other convicts, under the supervision of some infirm men. The temporal direction of the hospital was given to the superintendent of the province, who had trustees acting under him; the spiritual care of it was given to the priests of the Mission. This establishment has been the source of many blessings to the galley-slaves, and to the Mahommetans also, for the Chevalier of Simiane wrote to the Saint that these last were so moved by the charity shown them, that they rendered justice to a religion, which, in Jesus Christ, and by Jesus Christ, unites in one family all the people of the world.

The Dutchess of Aiguillon gave forty thousand pounds to the priests of the Mission, on condition that four of them should have charge of instructing and consoling the convicts, giving them Missions once in five years, either when the galleys were at Marseilles, or in any other port of the Kingdom. Thus did one poor priest incite the greatest persons in the country to procure all the assistance that the most attentive charity could render to these poor wretches, whom he considered his brethren. His zeal led him, soon after, to form a project which revealed to him the means of succoring throughout France, and even in strange countries, a vast multitude of unfortunate

beings, who had, ordinarily, neither resource nor consolation, but we will speak of this elsewhere, and will terminate this chapter with a letter written by Mr. Gault, Bishop of Marseilles, to the Dutchess of Aiguillon.

"The fruits of the Missions have surpassed all expectations. At first, minds were found not only ignorant but hardened in sin; so driven to desperation, at viewing their miserable lot, that they would not hear of God. Little by little the grace of God, by means of these Missionaries, softened their hearts, and now they show as much contrition as they evinced obstinacy before. You would be astonished to hear how many among them had passed many years without confession—some, twenty-five years, and who still protested that they wished to do nothing while they remained in captivity. But our Lord became master of their souls at last, driving from them Satan, who had usurped so much dominion over them. I praise God for His having imparted to you this inclination, to establish a Mission. The coming of the Missionaries made me decide on giving the Mission now; otherwise I might have deferred it, and several might have died in their bad state. I cannot tell you, Madam, how many blessings these poor criminals invoke upon all those who have aided in procuring so salutary an assistance for them. I am seeking means to preserve them in their good dispositions. I am going out to

absolve four heretics who were converted at the galleys,—others are seeking reconciliation to the Faith, for these extraordinary things have affected them sensibly."

To hear what this great Bishop says, one would suppose he had been but a spectator of the labors of the Mission, whereas he had been its soul. Hardly was this important Mission closed, whose success we have heard him recount, than the Church was called upon to lose in him one of her most beautiful models. The loss of this pastor was sensibly felt by those who had so recently labored under his eyes; however, they were far from desisting from their undertaking; they put their hands to the work with renewed fervor. Nearly thirty sectarians made their abjuration. A sick Turk was baptized on board one of the galleys, and nine other Mahometans were baptized with much solemnity, in the Cathedral Church, whither they had been borne, as in triumph by a vast concourse of people blessing God. The Missionaries desired, by giving so much publicity to the administration of the sacrament, on this occasion, to interest other Mahometans who seemed to hesitate.

The conversion of these ten Mussulmen had been preceded by that of seven others, whom the Bishop of Marseilles had the consolation of baptizing a little before his death. What conquests! and how precious in the eyes of Him, who would

have left the ninety-nine sheep in the desert, to go after the one that was lost! Such happy results determined the Duchess of Aiguillon to establish the Missionaries at Marseilles, as we have here seen. Since this foundation they have given Missions from time to time, either at Marseilles or Toulon, which have served to put a stop to many evils and to augment the number of the elect.

VIII.

HIS CONDUCT AND METHOD OF DIRECTION.

Although what we have already said would suffice, no doubt, to give an exact idea of the Saint's demeanor and conduct, yet we have thought that from these details, scattered here and there, we could form a whole calculated to instruct and edify. It is on the end proposed in our actions that their merit depends; Vincent had no other end than the glory of God. To it tended his thoughts, desires, projects, enterprises, advice, counsels, exhortations, and all the spiritual and temporal aid that he gave his neighbor. His conduct was in all respects conformed to that of Jesus Christ. The Gospel was his rule; he carried it as a torch in his hands to direct his steps. Two objects always occupied him, his own sanctification, and the sanctification

of his neighbor. He began with his own and continued with that of his neighbor; because he knew that a minister of the Son of God is raised up to produce fruit; but his conduct in laboring for the salvation of his brethren, deserves to have its principal characteristics retraced here.

It was always accompanied with great wisdom. A man through whose hands so many important affairs had passed, might have counted, reasonably, on his experience, at least, in his old age; but he alone ignored the acuteness of his own understanding, the extent of his lights, the wisdom of the measures he had taken; Vincent, to the end of his life, was as timid, as reserved, as at the age of forty. He undertook nothing without having recourse to God by fervent prayer. He willingly received advice, and as willingly followed it. He consulted his inferiors whenever the affair he was engaged in could be communicated. The law the Saint had imposed on himself, thus to deliberate, to consult, and to weigh a long time the reasons for and against, made him rather slow in taking a resolution, but when once taken, he inviolably adhered to it. He regarded as a temptation, all thought of abandoning a well concerted plan. He believed that God would not impute any faults to a man who could say to Him: O Lord, I have recommended this affair to you, and I have taken counsel, which is all that I can do to know your will.

Circumspection was another strong trait in his conduct. He was a declared enemy to all self conceit. He never wished to answer before having taken some time to reflect upon what was asked of him. When circumstances obliged him to decide without delay, he implored the Divine assistance, and rarely came to any determination that he could not support by the Holy Scripture, or by some action of the Son of God, and he always found something in the Scriptures analagous to the subject upon which he was consulted. The fear of charging himself with the sins of others, or of misapprehending the designs of God, made him very cautious when advising a person to choose one thing rather than another. Although he possessed great authority over his children, yet he was unwilling to assign their destination when he sent any into foreign countries. For extraordinary missions he chose only those to whose hearts God had spoken, and made known that he required so great a sacrifice. The grace of bidding an eternal adieu to family and dearest friends, is accorded only to such as supplicate for it long and fervently, therefore, the Saint judged, very reasonably, that a person called by God, would produce more fruit than many others would with less free and pure vocations.

These wise precautions never degenerated into weakness or too mild a condescension. He was accustomed to say that as the ill-success of war in

attributable to the generals of the army, the fall of religious communities should be attributed to the superiors; that the worst superiors are those who, to please their brethren and to be beloved by them, dissemble, and let things go on as they may; that he himself had seen one of the most regular communities in the church decay in less than four years, owing to the unconcern and indolence of a superior. "If, then," concluded he, "all the well-being of the community depends upon the superiors, we ought to pray to God very fervently for them, as being charged, and as having to render an account for all who are under their care." The Saint's firmness extended to every point of rule. It was not only in the houses of the congregation that he wished the rules to be inviolably observed, but he recommended that they should be adhered to as far as possible, whilst giving missions and during journeys. He even prescribed certain practices, which might compensate in some measure, for such of the rules as could not be kept by the brethren when absent from the community. When several priests journeyed together, he would name one as director of the others, in order to ensure the observance of the rule.

The Saint's firmness made him neither unfeeling nor imperious. Severe towards himself, he was full of indulgence towards others, and tried to satisfy them in all that they could reasonably expect from him. It was always difficult for him to

refuse anything, and he never did so as master, but only because he could not grant it. He made known his reasons for refusing, and if, later, these were removed, he would himself call to mind the request that had been made. "He always made use," says one of his brethren, "of very obliging words, never employing commanding expressions or any savoring of power and authority, but used entreaties: 'I pray you, my dear Sir, to do so and so, etc.' Whenever I went on a journey, or returned after an absence, I was overwhelmed with cordial welcomes. His words, filled with a certain spiritual unction, were so gentle, yet so efficacious, that he accomplished all he wished without using any constraint."

The manner in which he entered into the difficulties of others, was calculated to reanimate their courage. "I compassionate your situation," wrote he to a superior, dejected in his office, "but you must not be astonished at difficulties, still less, be cast down by them; you will meet them everywhere. Two men living together are a trial to each other. Were you even alone, you would be a burden to yourself, and you would find in yourself enough to exercise your patience; so true it is, that our miserable life is filled with crosses. I praise God for the good use that I am persuaded you make of yours. I have remarked too much wisdom and meekness in your disposition, to suppose that your patience ever fails you on trying

occasions. If you do not satisfy every one, be not disgusted, for our Lord Himself did not. How many did He find, and how many does He still find, to censure His words and actions."

The wants of his company having obliged him to separate two priests, living in holy union, he wrote to one of them, "I doubt not, that the separation from this dear and faithful friend will be sensibly felt by you. But remember, my dear Sir, that our Lord separated from His own mother, and that the Disciples, whom the Holy Spirit had so perfectly united, separated to serve their Divine Master." In one word, none under his direction suffered any affliction which he shared not, and to a greater extent. His tender concern was so marked, that it could not be unperceived.

Persuaded that a superior should require nothing which he practises not first himself, he was exact to all those exercises of the community, which cost nature most,—morning prayers—particularly. There was neither rule nor custom in his congregation, in which he gave not the example, and it may be added, that it was thus he established that fine order, which is still adhered to at St. Lazarus, and which has in all ages struck strangers with so much admiration; that house in which, in the words of a great Bishop: "At the first sound of the clock, two hundred persons appear in a place which, owing to the silence and peace reigning therein, had seemed to be entirely deserted." His

scrupulous, or rather, perfect exactness, enabled him to expect something like the same from his inferiors. He required it particularly from those whom he charged with the government of others. Such should teach by word and example. *Præsint ut prosint.* He said: "Those who are neither regular, nor exemplary, fail in essential qualities for governing others, and a person possessed of talent for governing in other respects, is neither fit to be a superior of a house, nor a director of a seminary, if he is not exact to the regular exercises."

To render his government beneficial to all with whose direction he was charged, the Saint endeavored first to destroy sin, and all that might be to them an occasion of sin. It was to accomplish this, that he established his internal seminary, which he converted into a school of virtue, wherein persons of all ages were admitted, and found, in the exercises of a spiritual life, infallible means to annihilate the old man and to clothe themselves in the new man—Jesus Christ. Disobedience was a fault which he deemed least pardonable in a seminarist, and if one guilty of it did not amend, it mattered not how many good qualities he possessed, he was dismissed. In his opinion, a man too much attached to his own will, is an enemy to that state of spiritual childhood spoken of in the Gospel, which is our only title to the Kingdom of Heaven, and such a person is incapable of that

holy self-abnegation which ought to be the principal virtue in the Disciples of the Son of God. On their coming forth from the seminary he required the seminarians, if their memories needed refreshing, to review their theology and philosophy, and gave them masters capable of nourishing their piety while they formed them to science. He feared nothing more than to see the young student diminish in fervor in proportion as he increased in knowledge, or to lose his time in mere vain and useless speculations of science. He was accustomed to say on this subject, that the time of transition from the seminary to studies is very critical, for, as a glass which passes from a heated furnace to a cold place runs the risk of being broken, so, a young man, who passes from a place of recollection, vigilance, and prayers, to the tumult of a class, runs the risk of losing something of the treasure of grace. He wished that the missionaries should have as much science as St. Thomas, provided they possessed the humility of that holy Doctor; he said that pride ruins great minds even as it ruined the angels of Heaven, and that science without humility, has always been pernicious to the Church. The conclusion of his advice was that youths should be trained so as to grow up useful to their neighbors, because there are few laborers in the Lord's vineyard, and the country people are exposed to damnation from want of instruction.

IX.

HIS ECCLESIASTICAL CONFERENCES.

Vincent did not confine his exertions to laboring for the salvation of the people, he endeavored to sanctify their pastors also. Whenever he met, in the cantons or provinces, any whose hearts God opened to receive his instructions, he would assemble them as frequently as he was able, to entertain them on the manner of preaching the Gospel, catechising children, hearing confessions, and of profitably administering the other sacraments of Holy Church. These beginnings of ecclesiastical conferences were a kind of rough sketch of those of which we are about to speak.

The success which the Divine intervention had given to the exercises for the aspirants to Holy Orders, penetrated his heart with a holy joy, but he apprehended that the weakness incident to our nature might cause those who had appeared models of virtue in their retreats, to become again like the generality of men, and that from being obliged to live, as the Apostle says, in the midst of a wicked and corrupt people, they might imbibe, little by little, the spirit of the world. He reflected on the means of perseverance for those whom the strength of grace and the unction of his dis-

courses had inspired with the design of living in a manner worthy of the state to which they had been called. Vincent prayed that God would make known to him what would be most pleasing in His eyes. The prayer of so humble a heart pierced the clouds, and the Most High listened to it. A pious ecclesiastic, who was in Paris, and at the exercises for aspirants to Holy Orders, proposed to him to assemble at St. Lazarus those who were desirous of preserving the graces they had received in ordination. He represented to Vincent that an association of this kind would do much good—that those who belonged to it would assist one another to live with regularity, and that by conferring together on the virtues and duties of their ministry, they would become better able to sanctify themselves and to sanctify others. Vincent received this proposition as if it had come directly from God Himself. He recalled to mind the great fruits produced in olden times, by those famous conferences of the fathers of the desert. He judged that if they had been so useful in fortifying the monks against the attacks of the enemy, they could not but be most advantageous to priests, who, being obliged to serve God in the world, are consequently much more exposed than were the solitaries of the East. After having been convinced by prayer, that the execution of this design would contribute much to the glory of God, he spoke of it to the Archbishop of Paris, who con-

sidered it his duty to approve of it. Vincent made choice of some subjects whom he deemed proper to commence this new association.

The holy priest arranged that the first assembly should be held at St. Lazarus. He, in substance, told the members, that, having the honor to be priests of Jesus Christ, they were obliged to fulfil the duties of the state which they had embraced, that it would be very sad if any one of them should give occasion to have it said of him, that he had, like the fool in the Gospel, begun to build but had not the courage to finish, that many priests verify the words of Jeremiah; how is the gold become dim, the most precious stones of the sanctuary scattered in the streets, being trampled on in public places; that to fall into so sad a state it is not necessary to commit great crimes,—it suffices to have grown cold in the service of God, and to have yielded to the distractions of the world. He added that it was not his design to separate them entirely from the world, nor even to have them reside in the same house,—that they might continue in their own houses, or with their relations, but that he wished to be of service to them by uniting them still more and more in those bonds of charity which already bound them, and that to succeed in this they must embrace a fixed rule of life, practice the same exercises of virtues, and entertain themselves occasionally on the duties of their calling, that to them might be applied what is said

by the prophet, that the stars have shed their light, each in its place; God called them and they said: Here we are; and they take pleasure in shining to render glory to Him who created them. That is to say, that there would be found in them, edifying examples to their families, and constant dispositions to accept any employments to which they may be called, so that Jesus Christ, the author of the sacerdotal dignity, would indeed be well satisfied with the services they rendered Him.

This discourse, made to men already full of the spirit of God, had all the effect anticipated. The joy that beamed on their countenances, manifested, perhaps better than words, the sentiments of docility and gratitude replenishing their hearts. In the second meeting, the order of exercises for their conferences was fixed. Their meetings were to be held every Tuesday, unless a festival or the vigil of one of the principal festivals should fall on that day; that the association should be formed of ecclesiastics already in holy orders, and whose characters were blameless; that the end of these conferences being to fortify them in piety, the subject of the discourses should, generally, be such virtues, duties and employments, as are suited to men engaged in the service of the altar. In fine, to draw still closer the bonds of that charity which unites the members, they should be attentive to visit and console one another, especially in afflic-

tion and illness; to assist at the obsequies of such members as God should call to Himself, and to say three masses or communicate three times for each dead member.

As regards the employment of time, Vincent prescribed that they should rise every day at a fixed hour, give a half hour every morning to mental prayer, celebrate the holy mass daily, and read afterwards with uncovered heads, and on their knees, one chapter of the New Testament, and to finish the reading by three interior acts, to consist in adoring the truths contained in the chapter which had just been read, in entering into the sentiments in which they are proposed, and in forming the resolution to reduce to practice the maxims it contains. These exercises, which comprise so perfectly the sacrifice of the morning spoken of in Holy Scripture, should be followed by a study selected in accordance with each one's talents and employments. Every repast should be preceded by a particular examen, the subject of which should be either the acquiring of a virtue, or the extirpation of some habitual fault. In the afternoon, some time should be given to the reading of a book of piety. The remainder of the time should be divided between study, the obligations of charity, or the requirements of propriety. A general examen on the faults into which they may have unhappily fallen, should terminate the day, which was, as we have seen, so well laid out.

The first conference was held on the 16th of July, 1633. Its subject was the ecclesiastical spirit. All spoke solidly, but with simplicity The holy priest had wisely foreseen that this exercise would become useless, if studied or too eloquent discourses were sought. Not that he wished a prelate to speak at random, without having thought on what he was to say,—he demanded a suitable degree of preparation, but he preferred that above all others which is made at the foot of the cross in the fervor of meditation. This was the general rule, and he would not suffer it to be departed from, unless the subject to be treated required special preparation. So, the finest geniuses in Europe have been seen at his conferences, speaking the most simple language of the children of God, contemning, what St. Paul calls the vain persuasion of human wisdom, and choosing always of two different expressions that which, less pleasing to man, is yet the best calculated to edify. The Saint gave them the example. When he was to speak in public, he drew less from science than from prayer. He had a special tact for introducing those examples and words of the Son of God which would bear relation to his subject, and as the Holy Spirit gave him a style which is never acquired by dry research, and by which he spoke to others with as much grace as he himself felt, he produced on the minds of his auditors the impressions he wished. Those who form

solid estimates of sermons derived as much pleasure as profit from listening to him. Bishops of the first merit frequented his conferences, and all were delighted with the noble simplicity of his discourses. They declared that they found in him that rare minister, who, according to the expression of the apostle St. Peter, spoke of God in a manner so wise, so elevated, that God Himself seemed to speak by his mouth. This was the testimony rendered to him forty-two years after his death, by Bossuet, the illustrious Bishop of Meaux,—that is to say, the man in all the world most capable of judging. In a letter to the common father of the faithful, he took Jesus Christ to witness that the holy man spoke the language of God, and that nearing him he recalled the words of the prince of the apostles: "If any one speak, let him speak as the words of God."—Epistle to Clement XI., August 2nd, 1702.

The Tuesday conferences soon became so celebrated that there was not an ecclesiastic of merit, in Paris, who did not wish to belong to them. Nothing was spoken of but the regularity and zeal of those who composed them. The Cardinal de Richelieu, informed of it by the public voice, exhorted the Saint to continue the good work he had commenced. He asked the names of those who were members of the conferences, and of those whom he judged most worthy of the episcopacy. This wise minister took the pains to write

out the list himself. He said to his niece, the Duchess of Aiguillon: "*I already had a high opinion of Mr. Vincent, but I regard him as another man since my last interview with him.*"

The edification given by the clergymen belonging to the conferences, in the different charges given them, and which, as a general thing, they had not accepted but by the advice of their pious director, finally induced Louis the Just, himself, to recur to the servant of God, and to demand men formed by him to fill places of ecclesiastical dignity. The holy man obeyed with simplicity; he would have thought it a betrayal of the interests of the church not to propose for the first places, the most capable men he knew, but he knew also how to engage the King and his ministers to secrecy. He himself preserved it so inviolably, that none of those clergymen knew the designs of the court in their regard. He felt that if the good dispositions of the prince should be made known, a large number of ecclesiastics, of the first distinction, would wish to be aggregated to men whose fortunes seemed so sure. Vincent, a declared enemy to ambition and all that could nourish it, took the necessary measures to guard against it. At the time when he foresaw that they would soon be placed at the head of dioceses, he spoke of nothing but the happiness of living and dying in obscurity. He employed them often in teaching catechism, preaching in hos-

pitals, in prisons, in country missions, and in such other employments as priests less virtuous would have disdained.

I would never be done, were I to attempt an exact detail of the blessings of which the conferences of St. Lazarus are the source, but I feel that I must give a slight sketch of them. Their first fruit was to fill the church of France with a large number of faithful ministers, who, full of the same spirit which animated our Saint, diffused it abroad. During Vincent's life-time the pious and illustrious founders of the celebrated communities of St. Sulpice and of Foreign Missions sprang from his association; twenty-tree archbishops and bishops, the majority of whom labored with as much courage as success in restoring the church to her first beauty; in fine, a vast number of vicar-generals, dignitaries, archdeacons, pastors, canons, directors of seminaries, visitors and confessors to religious houses, who were everywhere the good odor of Jesus Christ. Several were of rank, others became doctors of the Sorbonne—each one edifying by the regularity of his conduct; but, if the light which shines from good works, should, as our Saviour said, lead men to glorify God, the labors which they undertook at the suggestion of Vincent, produced effects much more striking. The servant of God had them as a body in reserve, from which he sent them forth to the right and to the left, employing them according to the exigen-

cies of time or place. He sent those who had most virtues and learning to give lectures to aspirants to Holy Orders, so that their discourses, supported by good example, might be doubly serviceable to the large number assembled for ordination at Paris, from all parts of the Kingdom. He sent others to various dioceses, to labor in giving to young seminarians exercises for ordination, or spiritual retreats to priests established by their bishops who approved his work for the reformation of the clergy. Worthy pupils of Vincent, they were not content with words, they joined, when necessary, works and alms. They aided most willingly, poor priests whom indigence obliged to live in a style that suited neither their dignity nor profession. Thus their enlightened zeal banished many scandals from the sanctuary; bad priests amended their lives, and those that were already serving God were fortified with new graces.

What redounded most to the honor of the Tuesday conferences, was the assiduity with which its members labored for more than fifty years, at the most painful and distasteful duties. Several of these pious ecclesiastics joined Vincent de Paul to shed the light of salvation in country places. They also undertook important missions in large cities, where the saint did not wish his own brethren to labor. Paris and several other cities experienced the effects of their charity. They

gave a mission in the asylum for the blind, for the blind themselves and others who wished to profit thereby—one, to the soldiers of the regiment of the French Guards, and another, to a large number of workmen who, till then, in laboring unceasingly had forgotten the first principles of salvation, and were living in absolute forgetfulness of God. They gave several in the General Hospital and the branch houses belonging to it. The finger of God was so manifestly directing them, that none failed to recognize it. Injustice, hatred and cupidity, the most unconquerable of the passions were subdued. The first historian of Vincent de Paul says: "If we were to go over in detail, the reconciliations, restitutions, and all the other blessings procured by these apostolic men, we would have sufficient matter to fill a volume."

The canons of Noyon, the ecclesiastics of Pontaise, Angouleme, Angers, Bordeaux, and several other places, took the conferences of St. Lazarus for their model. Those new establishments regarded Vincent as their founder, and he received letters from them not less respectful than affectionate. We quote but one, that of the celebrated Godeau, Bishop of Grasse. It will suffice to give us a correct idea of the esteem in which the most able prelates of the Kingdom held those famous conferences: "Be so good, gentlemen," said this prelate, "as to remember me in your sacri-

fices, let me assure you that I consider it a special blessing for me to have been received among you. The memory of the good example and the excellent things which I have seen, will re-animate my zeal, should it relent; and you are models upon which I wish to form good pastors. Continue then, your holy exercises in the same spirit, and respond faithfully to the designs of Jesus Christ, who wishes, no doubt, to renew in His church, through you, the graces of the priesthood."

X.

HIS CONFIDENCE IN GOD, AND CONFORMITY TO HIS WILL.

Confidence was a virtue which Vincent possessed in so eminent a degree, that, like the Father of believers, he hoped even against hope. He undertook things which even princes would not dare to undertake. He trusted in the Providence of God, and God, faithful to his Divine promises, failed him not. When anything was proposed to him, from the moment he was convinced that the design came from God, he used his utmost exertions to ensure its success; but he was different from those who not only set themselves to work,

but every one with whom they meet. The philosophy of the man of God was more peaceful, as it was derived from a more elevated source. He left God to act as far as he could, and awaited from Him the degree and moment of success. If any one, actuated by views of human prudence, represented to him that there was no apparent hope of his accomplishing what he had commenced, the Saint would reply: "Let us leave it to our Lord, it is His work, and as it has pleased Him to give us the suggestion, let us be assured that He will carry it out in the manner most agreeable to Himself. He will be the first and second in a work to which He Himself has invited us."

When once he had embarked in an undertaking upon this foundation, that the design came from God, and that God demanded its execution of him, he feared neither expense, labor, nor difficulties. Obstacles only animated him; nothing embarrassed him. Twenty times it was represented to him the danger that the house of St. Lazarus was in, to succumb under the expenses he incurred to support the aspirants to Holy Orders, and the great number who made retreats every week. Twenty times he replied, that the treasures of Providence are inexhaustible, that diffidence would dishonor God, and that his congregation would be destroyed sooner by riches than by poverty. Once, on the eve of an ordination, the procurator came with an anxious air to tell him that he had

not a penny to defray the expenses. "O what good news!" exclaimed Vincent. "Blessed be God! Now we shall prove whether we have confidence in God!" He made the like reply to an advocate in parliament, who in a retreat which he made at St. Lazarus, was surprised at seeing so many in the refectory, and asked our Saint how he was able to feed so many strangers, beside so large a family. It was not that God worked continual miracles in favor of Vincent de Paul, or came uncalled, to assist him in his indigence; he was sometimes reduced to use barley or oat-meal bread for the community, but he regarded these passing deprivations as so many trials which happened in the natural order of Divine Providence.

The spirit of confidence which animated the servant of God in times of scarcity, fortified him also, in the afflictions which befell either himself or his children; and so persuaded was he that this confidence in God ought to be one of the principal virtues of a missionary, that he made it the subject of several spiritual conferences. He therein proposed the example of Abraham, to whom God had promised to people the whole earth in the son whom He had given to him, which same son, however, He commanded him to offer in sacrifice. "Admire his confidence," the Saint would say, "Abraham gave himself no trouble about the event, although sensibly affected, but hoped all would go well, since God was

concerned in the matter. Why should we not have the same confidence, and leave to God the care of all that concerns us, preferring His guidance before every other consideration." Vincent also cited the example of the Rechabites. Their father, Jonadab, carried his confidence in God so far that he believed that his posterity could live without sowing, planting, or reaping. His whole family shared the same confidence, and the event proved that their confidence was not ill-founded. "Is it then wrong," said our Saint, in conclusion, "that we should be exhorted to hope, that in whatever situation God may place us, He will furnish us with necessaries? Know you not, that the birds neither sow nor reap, yet God spreads a board for them everywhere. He gives them covering and support. He even extends His providence over the grass of the fields, and the lilies, which are so magnificently adorned, that not even Solomon, in all his glory, was arrayed as one of these. Now, if God provides thus for the birds and plants, why do you not recur to Him? Is your industry a surer resource than His Goodness?"

Vincent recommended this same confidence in God to the Daughters of Charity, who, on account of the dangers of every kind, to which they are exposed, have still more need of mistrusting their own strength, and of confiding much in God. He promised them the assistance of God, in so decided a manner, that they may believe that he had secret

reasons for counting on a special providence over them, and God has well evinced that He watches over and guards these virtuous Daughters. "Ah! my Daughters," said the Saint, just after a Daughter of Charity had been rescued, unhurt, from amidst the falling timbers of a building, "what reason have you not to confide in God? We read in history, that a man was killed in an open field, by the fall of a tortoise upon his head from the talons of an eagle; and we have seen a Daughter of Charity come forth, to-day, without injury, from under the ruins of a house overturned to the ground. Is it not a sensible proof given by God that you are dear to Him? O, my Daughters, rest assured that, provided you preserve in your hearts this holy confidence, God will guard you wherever you are."

Vincent gave Mademoiselle Le Gras a slight reprimand, one day, because, under the impression that the company of the Daughters of Charity could not subsist without him, she had appeared too much disquieted at an illness with which he was attacked. "O! woman of little faith! Why have you not more confidence in the direction and example of Jesus Christ? This Savior of the world confided the welfare of the whole Church to God, the Father; and you, on account of a handful of Daughters whom His Providence has raised up and assembled in so wonderful a manner, you fear that He will fail you!" The immense store-

of confidence which God had poured into the heart of our virtuous Priest, aided him to pacify those tempted to despair. An ecclesiastic of high extraction, thus tempted, asked him for a remedy to this evil, which was preying upon him. The Saint replied: "God does not always permit His children to discern the purity of their interior, amidst the movements of corrupt nature, so that they may humble themselves without ceasing, and that their treasure being thus hidden, may be in greater security. St. Paul had seen the wonders of Heaven, but he did not consider himself thereby justified, because he saw in himself much darkness and interior struggle; he had, at times, such confidence in God, that he believed nothing in the world could separate him from the love of Jesus Christ. His example should be sufficient, my dear Sir, to enable you to remain in peace, amidst your obscurities, and to have an entire confidence in the infinite goodness of our Lord, who, wishing to accomplish the work of your santification, invites you to cast yourself into the arms of His Providence. Permit yourself, then, to be conducted by His paternal love, for He loves you; and, far from rejecting a man of good will, such as you are, He abandons not even the wicked, if they hope in His mercy."

Not only had the holy man confidence in God, he was in all things conformed to His holy will. From morning until night, he seemed to say, with

St. Paul, "*Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?*—and in what manner am I to do it?" Sickness or health, life or death, liberty or slavery, gain or loss, contempt or opprobrium, were alike in his eyes, provided God were pleased. He said, one day, to his brethren: "There is not one here present who has not tried to do some actions, to-day, which of themselves are good and holy; yet it may be that God has rejected these actions, because they have been performed by the movement of your own will. Is this not what the Prophet declared, when he spoke in God's name? I wish not your fasts. You think to honor me by them, and you do the contrary; because, when you fast, it is of your own will, and by this self-will, you spoil and corrupt your fast. Now, what Isaiah said of the fast, can be said of all other works of piety. The mixture of our own will spoils our devotions, our labors, and our penitential works; during twenty years I have never read this text from the prophet, at the Holy Mass, without being troubled. What then must be done, not to lose our time and our labors? It is necessary never to act by an impulse of self-interest, inclination, humor or fancy, but to accustom ourselves to do the will of God in everything; I say in all, and not in part; for this is the effect proper to that grace which renders the person and the action equally agreeable to God."

This conformity to the will of God was necessary to the Saint, in the crosses God prepared for him

personally, or for his children. He saw them, more than once, like the just, of whom St. Paul makes mention, in poverty, oppression, misery and chains. Yet, notwithstanding all, his tranquillity was invariable. The single word, *God wills it*, calmed his disquietudes. Soon after the plague had carried off six or seven of the Saint's brethren, who labored at Genoa, this same house where tears were still flowing, had the misfortune to lose a very important lawsuit. "Long live Justice." said Vincent, in a letter he addressed to the Superior, who had written announcing this double loss; "we must believe it has triumphed in the loss of your lawsuit. The same God who gave you property, has taken it from you; may His holy name be blessed! Wealth is an evil, when it is where God does not will it to be; the more we shall be like our Lord; divested of all things, the more of his spirit will be ours. The more we seek, like Him, to establish the Kingdom of God His Father, in ourselves and in others, the more of the necessaries of life will be given us. Live in this confidence, and do not anticipate the sterile years of which you have spoken If they come, it will not be by your fault, but in the order of Providence, whose decrees are always adorable. Let us leave ourselves, then, to be ruled by our Heavenly Father; and try not to have any will here on earth but His."

In accordance with the Italian proverb, "*It is well to help ourselves a little*," some one wrote to

him that if he wished his congregation to succeed, and have good subjects, he must establish it in large cities. The Saint rejected this proposition, very energetically. "We cannot take any steps towards establishing ourselves in any place whatever, if we wish to conform to the ways of God, and the usages of the company; for to the present time, His Providence has called us to those places where we now are, without our having sought them, either directly or indirectly. Now, it can not be but that this resignation to God, which thus holds us in dependence on Him, should be very agreeable to Him, so much the more so, as it destroys human sentiments, which, under the pretence of zeal and of the glory of God, would often make us undertake designs which are not inspired or blessed by Him. He knows what is suitable for us, and will give it to us in the proper time, if, like true children, we abandon ourselves to so good a Father. Certainly, if we are well persuaded of our worthlessness and inability, we will be careful not to meddle in the harvest of another, before called to do so, or to prefer ourselves to other laborers, whom perhaps, God had destined for it."

Something very advantageous to his congregation was proposed to the holy Priest and as one of his brethren pressed him to give his consent, he made this beautiful reply: "We would do well to delay this affair for awhile, so as to blunt the point of nature's inclinations which desires that

affairs should be promptly executed, and thus habituate ourselves to the practice of holy indifference, and allow our Lord to manifest His will, while we recommend the matter to Him by prayer. Rest assured, that if it is pleasing to Him, the delay will not cause any loss; and that the less it will depend on us, the more it will depend on Him."

After having remarked that this spirit of indifference is peculiar to all the saints, he said: "It is a spirit by which a person is so detached from creatures, and so perfectly united to the will of the Creator, as to be almost without desire for one thing rather than another." The servant of God concluded that after the example of the saints his Missionaries should be indifferent to all things. "You know," he would say, "that amongst the laborers mentioned in the Gospel, some were called late, and yet, nevertheless, were rewarded in the evening the same as those who had labored since morning; thus it will be as meritorious for you to await patiently for the manifestation of the will of the Master, as to accomplish it when made known to you, seeing that you are ready to go or to remain. God be blessed for this holy indifference which renders you fit instruments for the work of God."

p. 147

XI.

CONVERSIONS EFFECTED BY ST. VINCENT DE PAUL.

When the servant of God was in slavery, he was bought first by a fisherman of Tunis, and again sold by him to one who was both physician and alchemist. Achmet I., having learned the ability of this physician, ordered him to repair to Constantinople, to be attached to his suite. Our Saint was sensibly affected. The unfortunate chemist sank under the weight of a reputation, which was obliging him to leave his country at his advanced age, and died of grief on the journey. He left a nephew in Tunis, and as slaves form a part of a man's fortune Vincent passed to a third master, but was with him only a short time. A report was spread that Mr. de Breves, the French ambassador, had demanded and obtained of the Grand Seignior, in the name of his Most Christian Majesty, the liberty of all French slaves. This report, well founded, alarmed the people of Tunis. Those who were first to hear the news, hastened to dispose of their slaves. Vincent once more changed his patron. He fell into the hands of a renegade, originally

from Nice, in Savoy. This new Master employed Vincent on a farm, and the Saint naturally concluded that he was never farther from regaining his freedom, yet he was nearer to it than he supposed, and what seemed to remove him from all hope, was precisely the means by which God set him free. The renegade had three wives—one was a Greek Christian, but a schismatic,—another was a native Turk, and a Mahometan by religion. Vincent has not spoken of the third; the second became the instrument of God's mercy. She perceived something unusually exalted in the modesty and patience of her slave. She often went out to see him in the fields where he was working, and asked him a thousand questions about the religion of the Christians, their habits and ceremonies. She commanded him, one day, to sing the praises of the God he adored. A man full of the spirit of the psalms, recalled those touching words dictated by the grief of the children of Israel, in their Babylonian captivity like his own in Barbary. He chanted the Psalm: "*Super flumina Babylonis—Upon the rivers of Babylon*," the Salve Regina, and some other sacred hymns, of the like character, which made a striking impression on the Mahometan lady. He spoke to her of the excellence of the Christian religion.

This lady, surprised and charmed with what she had heard, told her husband that he had done very wrong to quit his religion—that from what Vin-

cent had told her of it, it seemed to her *extremely good*, and that the God of the Christians did not deserve to be forsaken. These remarks were far from soothing an apostate, for though man is free to forsake his first vocation, he is not master to stifle the cries of conscience, and the most hardened sinner hears in his interior, an importunate voice which speaks louder than that which strikes his ear. The confused Savoyan made no answer, but on the morrow he opened his heart to Vincent, assuring him that he was ready to make his escape with him. The providential moment did not come for ten months. The master and slave took a small skiff, alike unequal to encounter the waves and the corsairs. Had they been discovered and pursued, death would have been inevitable. The case of two men, one abjuring Mahometanism, the other about to do so, would soon be disposed of, —both would have been impaled without any form of trial. All these dangers deterred not our voyagers. They consigned their fate into the hands of God,—they invoked her on whom the church bestows the title, "*Star of the Sea.*" Their hope was not confounded, and on the 28th of June they arrived at Aigues-Mortes, whence they proceeded to Avignon.

The renegade manifested every mark of the most sincere conversion, and was reconciled publicly by the vice-legate, Peter Montorio. This prelate procured his reception into the hospital of

St. John of God, which he had made a vow to enter to do penance—he did, in fact, bind himself by a perpetual vow, to the service of the sick. His conversion was the work of the holy priest.

Vincent being with the Countess of Joigny, at the castle of Folleville, diocese of Amiens, was called to Gennes, a little village two leagues from Folleville, to hear the confession of a peasant dangerously ill. The conscience of this unhappy being was loaded with many mortal sins, which a false shame had always hindered him from making known. Encouraged by his director's meekness, he confessed those secret faults which he had never had the courage to declare. The penitent was relieved of a heavy burden which had for years overwhelmed him. What was singularly remarkable, he passed from one extreme to another, and during the three days that he survived, he made several public confessions of those sins which he had for so long a time concealed, even in the tribunal of penance. The Countess of Joigny having gone to see him, he exclaimed, as soon as he saw her: "Ah! Madam, I would have been damned if I had not made a general confession, owing to several grievous sins which I had not dared to confess." He owed these good sentiments to the servant of God, and his death gave much edification to all who witnessed it.

Among the conversions wrought by the ministry of Vincent at Chatillon, may be remarked that

of two young persons, Madam de la Chassaine and Madam Cajot de Brunand, who, full of the maxims and spirit of the world, made but a bad use of the charms of their sex, and the advantages of fortune. Their manners savored of the corruption of the world, in which they had been raised. Enslaved to luxury and fashion, they had lost sight of those just limits prescribed by St. Paul to those who have embraced the Gospel. From the Saint's first discourse in public, they conceived a high idea of his merit. His fiery style moved them; they visited him. It was there that grace awaited them. Perceiving the uneasiness of conscience to which he had given birth, Vincent spoke to them with so much force, that, unmindful of the opinion of the world, they formed the resolution to renounce its pomps, and to consecrate themselves, unreservedly, to the service of Jesus Christ and of the poor, His members. Their zeal rendered them worthy later, of being the first stones of the spiritual edifice, which the holy man raised up in favor of the sick, and which, under the name of an association of charity, has since served as a model to so many others, as we have seen.

The conversion of these ladies redounded much to the credit of the Saint through the whole country, but it won not more fame nor more honor for his labors, than that of the Count of Rougemont. He was a lord of Savoy, who had withdrawn into

France when Henry IV. united Bresse to his Kingdom. Having spent his life in court he had imbibed, as happens but too often, to those who frequent it, its sentiments and maxims. As duelling was then the ruling passion, in persons of rank, and the most proper means of acquiring that false reputation, of which they are so jealous, the Count of Rougemont, who knew not how to pardon or dissemble an injury, was one of the greatest duellists of his age. The number of homicides committed by him seems incredible. Vincent's reputation having been speedily spread over Bresse, the Count wished to know personally, a man of whom he had heard so many extraordinary things. The word of the Saint was to him that two-edged sword spoken of in the Scripture, it entered, it penetrated even to the depths of his soul—the man who had made so many others tremble began himself to tremble. His conscience horrified him, and to calm it he chose the Saint for his director. His return to God, as perfect as it was rapid, was unmarked by that period of weakness and imperfection too often discernible in penitents, and Vincent found more difficulty in moderating his fervor, than other directors find in urging their penitents to commence such a course. It was a subject of surprise to the whole province, to see a man, excessively vindictive and sensitive, knowing no other laws than those of the formalities of life, embrace, in less than fifteen days, the most rigor-

ous exercises of a truly Christian life. He at once sold his estate of Rougemont, and employed the proceeds either in founding monasteries, or in relieving the indigent. The castle of Chandes, his usual residence, was a shelter for religious and a kind of hospital for the poor. Nothing was wanting, either for body or soul, because the Count entertained ecclesiastics who had no other occupation than to console and instruct them. So exalted was his idea of poverty, that he wished to renounce all his property to be conformable to Him, who being rich, became poor for us. Vincent was obliged to exercise all his authority to hinder him from taking this step, and the Count had need of all his submission to yield to his advice. "Ah! Father," said he, one day, to a Father of the Oratory, in Moulins, "must I possess so much property? Why does Mr. Vincent impose so hard an obligation? Why will he not let me do it? for I assure you, if he but relaxed his hold, before one month I would not possess an inch of land, and I cannot understand how a Christian can possess anything as his own, seeing that the Son of God was so poor on earth."

As the light of the just, however bright it may be at its commencement, increases always, and goes on increasing until it forms perfect day, the count made daily new progress. Prostrate at his Saviour's feet, he bewailed in the bitterness of a just grief, the ignorances of his youth, and the ex-

cesses of his more advanced age, and wept for the irreparable loss of so many souls, that the love of false glory had made him precipitate into the abyss, and with the prophet, he bit the dust to glean a ray of hope. He gave three or four hours regularly to meditation, of which the early sufferings and passion of Jesus Christ was the principal subject. The Count walked on, to the last moment, in the way in which his director had placed him. At the close of his days, he was proved by a long and serious illness, but his love was more constant than his sufferings were continual. In fine, when near death, he asked for a Capuchin Father, and received the humble habit of St. Francis. This penitential garb seemed to him more glorious than all the dignities with which he had been clothed. No one doubted but that his death was precious in the sight of the Lord; every one loaded him with benediction, but all reverted to the praise of Vincent of Paul, to whom, after God, the count was indebted for his conversion.

The holy priest did not limit his zeal to those who are, according to St. Paul, members of the household of faith,—he extended it to those whom the new heresies had separated from the Church. One of the first whose conversion he undertook was that of Sir Reynier, with whom he lodged on coming to Chatillon. He was a young man, who had inherited his parents' errors, as well as their extensive estates, and consequently, he had at his

command every facility for plunging into all kinds of excess,—he was given to every extravagance. Vincent, after the example of the Son of God, who willingly conversed with publicans, and bestowed more care on the sick than on those in health, by degrees acquired an influence over him. Vincent made him aware of the danger to which his perverse ways and heretical views exposed his eternal salvation, and by degrees, insensibly withdrew him from a crowd of libertines, who had besieged him —in fine, represented to him, in the liveliest manner, that if libertinism harmonizes well with a religion that makes God the author of sin, it accords not with the true religion of Jesus Christ.

The words of the man of God finally moved Sir Reynier. His unlooked for change of conduct alarmed the ministers of Chatillon. A rich man is important with sectarians, he aids their party, and his name swells their list. They spared no exertion to retain one whose loss they feared only because he was becoming wiser; but their reproaches and solicitations were alike useless. Grace was working, and the convert after having renounced his excesses renounced also his heresy. He embraced celibacy for the rest of his life, gave up those farms which no one claimed, but whose title, derived from his parents, seemed to him doubtful. He liberally relieved all the afflicted when plague and famine ravaged the city of Chatillon. What little property remained to him, when God called him to Himself,

was in accordance with his last wishes, employed in works of piety and mercy.

The conversion of Reynier was followed by that of several others, but none made more noise than that of the Messrs. Garrons, because none was more widely known. Their father was one of the most zealous partisans of the so-called reformed religion. The conversion of his brother-in-law, Reynier, had annoyed him, but when he saw that his own children were being undeceived, he was beside himself. He made use of all his paternal authority in the most impressive manner. He threatened to disinherit his children, and indicted Vincent in the chamber of decrees at Grenoble. He set his friends and ministers to work. All was useless, because neither strength nor power prevails over the designs of God. His children were all converted. The unhappy father died of grief, but his death itself animated the faith of his family. His eldest son entered the Franciscan order, his daughter became an Ursuline, the rest appeared in the world giving high examples of charity, disinterestedness, and above all, of zeal for the glory of God.

The city of Montmirel was one of those in which Vincent made the most difficult and most glorious conquests. Madam de Gondi having learned that there were three heretics in that vicinity, asked him to undertake their conversion. The conference between them and the holy priest took place in the castle. He expounded to them the dogmas

of the Church, in all their simplicity, that is, alike free from the disputes of the schools and the dark colorings usually given them by the ministers of the so-called reformed religion. He listened patiently to their objections, and met them with that precision which was his special gift, and which is still admired in his letters and conferences. After the sixth conference, two yielded, who, after having been so happy as to recognize the truth, were generous enough to embrace and publicly profess it. It was not so with the third.

This man, possessed of but ordinary mind and talents, was one of those who eagerly seize all that favors their prejudices, and disdain to listen or search into what would enlighten them, who have sufficient address to multiply objections, but not light enough to see how unavailing they are, even when they feel them to be so,—in fine, who imagine that their conduct is beyond reproach, because they see what is defective in that of others. Such was the man with whom Vincent had to deal. He thought himself skilled, he mingled with dogmatizers, lived badly enough, yet made the bad lives of some Catholics his self-defence, and returned each day to the charge with new difficulties. One of his difficulties manifests how terrible is the judgment which God will exercise over bad priests, and that it is with great justice that He should, in the words of Ezechiel, avenge upon the indolence of pastors the loss of the sheep He had confided to them.

"You pretend, Sir," said this heretic to our Saint, "that the Church of Rome is led by the Spirit of God, but I cannot believe it, because on one side we see Catholic country people left to vicious and ignorant pastors, uninstructed in their duties, for the most part, only knowing the Christian religion by name; on the other, we see cities full of priests and monks who are doing nothing, and yet they leave those poor people in their frightful ignorance to their eternal loss, and you wish to persuade me that this is by the guidance of the Holy Spirit? I will never believe it."

The servant of God was afflicted to see a heretic justify his revolt against the Church, by the conduct of those whose life should be so edifying as to draw the pagan and the infidel into it. He conceived a new and extended idea of the spiritual necessities of the country people, and the necessity of aiding them. Yet, not to leave unanswered a difficulty in which, really, there was nothing solid, and which could be urged as conclusively against Protestants as Catholics, Vincent dissembled the evil as much as he could, replied that many parishes had good pastors and curates, that among the ecclesiastics and religious, so numerous in cities, some went to catechise and preach in the country,—that amongst those who remained shut up in their monasteries, some were occupied in praying to God, and singing His praises, night and day, others were useful to the public, compos-

ing learned works, teaching the Christian Doctrine to the people, and administering the sacraments. He added that those who remained idle, not acquitting themselves as they ought of their duties, were exceptions, men subject to error; that they were, in truth, in the church, because it includes the chaff and the wheat, but that they do not constitute the Church, on the contrary, they resist the Holy Spirit which governs it. He concluded by explaining what Catholics understand when they teach that the Church is directed by the Holy Spirit, and made it clear that this direction means either the Church as a whole body, which cannot be deceived in its decisions, or private members who cannot go astray, when they follow the light of faith and the rules of Christian justice. So reasonable an answer should have satisfied him to whom it was addressed, yet it failed to do so, and he continued to maintain that the ignorance of the people, and lack of zeal among the priests were infallible proofs that the Roman Church was not led by the Spirit of God.

In order to prevent like objections, Vincent had his most talented friends distribute the bread of the word of God in Montmirel. The fame of the mission was spread throughout the country. The heretic, before mentioned, examined, with all the attention of a pre-possessed person, into all the exercises that were given. He assisted at sermons and catechism. He observed the care taken to

teach to the ignorant the truths necessary to salvation. He admired the charity with which they accommodated themselves to the weakness and dullness of the vulgar, to make them aware of what they ought to believe, and to understand what they must practice. In fine, he witnessed the conversion of a large number of sinners. Impressed by all this, he told our Saint: "Now I see that the Holy Spirit governs the Roman Church, since it takes care of the instruction and salvation of poor villagers. I am ready to enter it whenever you are willing to receive me." Vincent having asked him if he found no further difficulties or doubts, he replied: "No, I believe all that you have told me, and I am ready to renounce all my errors publicly."

Our holy priest, to be still farther assured of the sound faith of his convert, questioned him in detail, upon some of the most controverted tenets between us and Protestants, and upon those about which he had been most obstinate. He was satisfied with his answers, and saw with pleasure that he had not forgotten what had been taught him. The next Sunday was fixed upon for absolving him from his heresy. The assemblage was large, for the intended ceremony had been rumored abroad, —all thanked God for the return of the wandering sheep, and rejoiced to see it returning willingly to the fold, but this holy joy was disturbed by an unlooked-for incident.

Vincent having asked him publicly, if he still persevered in the design of abjuring his errors, he replied, truly, that he still desired to abjure them, but added, that a new difficulty had presented itself to his mind, on seeing a badly-carved stone statue of the Holy Virgin, in which, he said, pointing with his finger, he could not believe there was any virtue. The Saint answered that the church taught not that there was any virtue in mere material statues, but that God could communicate virtue to them, that He had done so from time to time, as He did, formerly, to the rod of Moses, which wrought so many miracles, but that of themselves they had neither strength nor power, and that, in short, this dogma of our faith is so well understood in the Church that even children can explain it. The holy priest immediately called one of the best instructed, and asked him what we ought to believe about holy images. The child answered that it was good to have them and to render them due honor, not on account of their material, but because they represent to us our Lord, His glorious Mother, and the Saints reigning in Heaven, and who, having triumphed over the world, exhort us by their mute images to imitate their faith and good example. Vincent enforced the truth of this answer and made the heretic own that the difficulty he had started was without foundation, and should not have been proposed by a man instructed upon this

article as well as upon others. The Protestant surrendered in good faith. He abjured his errors before all the parish, and persevered until death in the Catholic faith. The order and detail of this conversion remained indelibly engraven on the memory of the Saint, because the care he took to instruct the country people had been its principal moving spring.

XII.

HIS DISINTERESTEDNESS AND DETACHMENT FROM THE GOODS OF EARTH.

A certain individual who had given an endowment, of four thousand pounds, for missions, to the priests of the Missions, became very poor. As soon as Vincent was informed of it, he wrote to him entreating him to take the revenue arising from it, and added that if this income were not sufficient to relieve him, he would give him a reconveyance of the capital and to induce the poor man to speak more freely, he told him it was not the first time that he had acted in this way. Some years after, under apprehensions concerning one of the benefactors of his congregation, who, although in embarrassed circumstances, was yet far from regretting his liberality, Vincent said to

him: "I entreat you to use the property belonging to our company as if it were your own. We are ready to sell all that we have for you, even our chalices. We would only be doing what is expressly ordained by the canons, to return to our founder in his need, what he has given us from his abundance; and what I tell you, my dear Sir, I say before God, and from the depth of my heart."

A number of ladies, of the highest rank, having offered this holy priest the sum of six hundred pounds, to enable him to build a new church, he would not accept it, alleging as his motive for refusing it, that the poor would be the sufferers, and that Jesus Christ demands, before all, temples of charity and mercy.

For nearly two entire years they urged him to take a farm on a life lease; but the pension was so large, and the times so bad, that Vincent did not wish to have the subject mentioned. The aged Prior of St. Lazarus was the only one able to make him change his opinion, and he exercised his influence at the solicitation of interested persons. The Saint signed the contract, but not till he had consulted experienced persons, who assured him that there was no risk. Never did a piece of property cost him more dearly. He paid the rent exactly as had been stipulated, and made a number of important improvements on the grounds he had acquired. He saw the fields harvested

fraudulently, more than once, just as he was ready to reap them; and to overwhelm him with disgrace, the lease of the farm was reversed by a judgment after the death of those who had sold it to him.

As soon as he heard of the loss of his suit, he wrote to Mr. Desbordes, auditor in the Chamber of Accounts, in Paris: "Good friends communicate to one another the good and the evil which happens to them, and as you are one of the best friends we have, I cannot forbear making known to you the loss we have sustained, by a suit about the Orsigny farm; yet, it is not a misfortune, but a grace God has granted us, so be pleased to aid us in thanking Him. I call the grace of God, the afflictions He sends us, particularly such as are well received; now, as His Infinite Goodness had disposed us to bear this loss before it was decreed, it has also made us resigned in this loss with an entire conformity; and, I dare say, with as much joy as if all had been favorable. This would seem a paradox to one not versed, like you, in the affairs of Heaven, and who knows not that to be conformed to the will of God, in adversity, is a greater blessing than all temporal advantages."

When the news of the judgment was spread abroad, a large number of persons, experienced in business details, besought the holy man to present a petition to the higher court. One of his judges suggested this means to him,—one of the most

celebrated crown lawyers assured him it would be infallible, and offered to plead, not only free of charge, but to indemnify the house of St. Lazaras should it fall a second time into a like misfortune. To these considerations, which gave hope without any fear, he added another, which could not but have great weight with the servant of God. Mr. de Lamoignon was about to be placed by the King, at the head of parliament. All the house of this illustrious magistrate made public profession of esteem for Vincent de Paul; it had for a long time, been associated to his good works, and no one knew better than did the first president how pure were the views of the holy man.

Notwithstanding these considerations, Vincent felt inclined to submit. Not to offend his friends, who urged him to opposition, he gave them an account of his reasons for not thinking with them. "Though assured," wrote he to Mr. Desbordes, "that we have strong grounds for presenting a petition to parliament, we cannot resolve to make one; first, because eight lawyers, whom we consulted, collectively and individually, before the judgment was passed against us, always assured us that we had an infallible tenure. The court, however, has judged otherwise; so true is it that opinions differ, and that we can never depend upon the judgment of men. Secondly, as it is one of our customs, during missions, to settle differences between parties, it is to be feared that

if the company should be so obstinate as to renew the contest by this petition,—the refuge of chicanery—God will deprive it of the grace of laboring for reconciliations or settlements. Thirdly, we would give great scandal by pleading to destroy so solemn a judgment. We would be charged with being too much attached to property, which is the reproach cast upon ecclesiastics, and our invectives in the palace would make us do a wrong to communities, and would scandalize our friends. Fourthly, we will have reason to hope that if, on the one side, the world takes from us, God, on the other, will give to us. We have experienced this even since the judgment of the court, for God has permitted that one of the counsellors of the same chamber in which judgment was passed against us, should leave us, at his death, almost as much as this property is worth. In fine, Sir, to say all to you, I find it difficult to go contrary to the counsel of our Lord, who does not wish those who follow Him, to go to law, and if we had recourse thereto, it was because I could not conscientiously give up the property of the community, of which I have only the administration, without doing what I could to hold it, but now that God has discharged me of that obligation, by a decree which has rendered my exertions of no avail, I think I should be content."

Vincent believed it not enough to acquiesce in the sentence passed against him, he wished that

his brethren should return thanks to God. He made this matter the subject of a conference, in which he reasoned that in thus losing much, they had gained much; and that God had been gracious to them in retrenching the occasion of relaxation, by which the senses could scarce be grati fied except at the expense of fervor. "O! my brothers, should it please God that this temporal loss be recompensed by an increase of confidence in His providence, abandonment to His guidance, detachment from earthly goods, and self-renunciation, how happy would we be! I dare hope from His paternal goodness, which ordains all for the best, that He will grant us this grace; but what are the fruits which we should derive from all this? The first is, that we ought to offer to God all the blessings and consolations that remain to us, as well those of the body as those of the spirit; to offer him ourselves, so perfectly that He may dispose absolutely of our being, and of all that we have, according to His most holy will. So that we may be always ready to quit all to embrace whatever ignominious inconveniences and afflictions may befall us, and by this means follow Jesus Christ in His poverty, humility and patience. The second is, never to have recourse to law, whatever reason we may have for doing so; or if we are forced, let it be only after having tried all possible means to settle the matter, and at least let the right be clear and evident; for whoever

trusts to the opinion of men will be frequently deceived. We will thus practice the counsel of our Savior, who says: 'If any one wishes to take your cloak, give him your coat also.' If the company adhere firmly to these principles, God will bless it; and if it lose on one side, He will give it on the other." This prediction of the Saint was not long unverified—his letter to Mr. Desbordes is a good proof of it.

Though the most enlightened of his time considered him great in every respect, yet in nothing, perhaps, was he more so than in his absolute detachment. "In my position as Secretary of State," said Mr. le Tellier, "I had a great deal of intercourse with Mr. Vincent. He accomplished more good works in France, for religion and the church, than any one I ever knew; but I have remarked, particularly, that in the council of conscience, where he was the principal actor, there was never question of his own interests, of those of his congregation, nor those of the ecclesiastical seminaries which he had established. He employed his influence for all whom he deemed worthy, but he himself was cut off from the list of those who could hope for favors. His nearest relatives received nothing from him. He was often solicited in behalf of his nephews, but he always answered that he much preferred to see them digging the earth rather than enjoying benefices. Hence, to judge as the world considers matters, he lost more

than he gained by being at court. Had he asked the house of St. Julian, for himself, it seems certain he would have obtained it, but he only thought of securing it to those who enjoy it to this day. An old doctor, C. M. le Bigot, renders this testimony, and his judicious summary would find place here, did we not think that acts are more conclusive proofs in these matters, and are read with less weariness.

A year of prayers and entreaties could not make Vincent decide on taking the house of St. Lazarus; and when his right to it was contested by the gentlemen at St. Victor's, he wished to leave it. He would have relinquished it had it not been made evident that he could not do so conscientiously; and so indifferent was he about the success or non-success of this great affair, that his astonished judges could not help exclaiming, that Mr. Vincent was a man of another world.

An ecclesiastic presented him one thousand crowns, but Vincent, though reduced to extreme need, refused them, saying: "Two thousand poor patients at the Hotel-Dieu have still greater need of them." The King's procurator, in one of the largest cities of the Kingdom, gave his property to the congregation, but Vincent restored it to the relations of the person, because the donation had displeased them. In fine, seeing his house in danger of being pillaged by one of two armies defiling off in their neighborhood, after the battle of the

Faubourg of St. Anthony, he ordered that should such a misfortune occur, all his community must repair to the church, and prostrate at the feet of the Son of God, offer to Him as to its Sovereign Master, all its goods and chattels, and then thank him very humbly for having despoiled them.

The detachment of the holy priest extended even to his congregation, since he never wished to take, nor would he allow his brethren to take a single step to procure better subjects or finer establishments. The maxim, to leave all to God, to be abandoned to Him unreservedly, to follow and not to go in advance of His Providence, occurs so frequently in his letters that it is evident he never lost sight of it. "You tell me," did he write to one of his priests in Poland, "that the King and Queen have gone to Cracow, and that it is proper that some of our brethren should go there to attempt to form an establishment. Let me assure you that our company holds it for an inviolable maxim, never to solicit any establishment, and that to this day, by the grace of God, it has conformed to this maxim, and if it credits me it will always do the same. What happiness to be in the places where God wishes us to be! And what a misfortune would it be to be established where God has not called us!"

The Saint could have said something still stronger, for he kept secret that certain establishments, as those of Toul and St. Meen, had been formed in

spite of him, we may say, and by a kind of apathy with regard to the progress of his congregation, he had missed making many others, as those of Notre-Dame, of Betharam, to which the Bishop of Lescar, the parliament of Navarre and eight priests, who served that famous pilgrimage, had urged him to send his missionaries.

He pursued the same course with the Sisters of Charity. Not only would he not suffer them to be importunate about making establishments, but he even wished that they should be disposed to sacrifice those that they had. He withdrew them from Mans, whither they had been called, because they could not remain there without occasioning some contests which he wished to avoid. Upon being informed that the administrators of the hospital in Nantes, thought of substituting some religious hospitallers in place of the Sisters, he wrote to the gentlemen that he had heard a great deal in favor of those religious, that they were in Dieppe, where they were doing wonders, and that if they wished to dismiss the daughters of Mademoiselle Le Gras, he very humbly entreated them to do so without ceremony. To inspire the foundress with the same sentiments, he sent his letter to her unsealed, and ordered the bearer to tell her that this dismissal ought not to give her any pain, since the spirit of Christianity inclines us to enter into the sentiments of another, and that when we leave God to act, He knows well how to draw His glory from the changes made by man.

XIII.

HIS PRIVATE DEVOTIONS.

Vincent had a very elevated conception of the infinite greatness of God. The appearance of self-annihilation which he had during the exercises of religion, the respectful terms in which he spoke of God and the ardent zeal he manifested to communicate like sentiments to others, were as so many proofs of the dispositions of his soul. Although he retired at a very late hour, he rose regularly at four o'clock, and this with so much fervor, that the second sound of the bell never found him in the same posture as the first. He began the day by offering to God his thoughts, words and actions, in union with those of Jesus Christ. He then made his meditation; afterwards, he would recite by himself the Litany of the Holy Name of Jesus, in a loud voice. He would then go either to confession, which he frequently did, because, as one of his directors declares, *he could not endure even the shadow of sin*, or to make his preparation for the Holy Mass. It may be affirmed that in this great action, he was a model to the most perfect

priests. He pronounced all the words in so distinct and affectionate a manner, that it was easy to see that his mouth gave expression to the sentiments of his heart. His modesty, the tone in which he pronounced those words which remind the priest of his sins and unworthiness, the serenity of his countenance when he turned towards the people to announce the peace and benediction of God; in a word, everything in his exterior was calculated to make an impression upon such as are least susceptible. He seemed like an angel at the altar. He said Mass daily, excepting the first three days of his annual retreat, on which it is customary in his congregation to abstain from offering up the Holy Sacrifice; as long as he was able to stand, he never omitted it even on his journeys. His ordinary indispositions did not prevent him; he would ascend the altar while in the fever by which he was habitually tormented. His love for the Lamb which has been slain from the beginning of the world sustained him, so that he would sometimes hear, or even serve another Mass, after having said his own. He has been seen at the age of seventy-five, and when he could hardly walk, to take upon himself the honor of thus fulfilling the office of an acolyte. He said: "It is shameful for an ecclesiastic raised to the service of the altar, to allow persons not in orders to perform his office, in his very presence."

His piety was not less conspicuous in the solemn

offices. On seeing him sing, or chant the Psalms in choir, one would have taken him for a seraph, rather than a man, so much was he elevated above himself. He wished that his brethren should sing gravely, having their eyes lowered on their books, and never looking to the right or to the left. Hence, in the Church of St. Lazarus, even now the office is conducted with a dignity and modesty not surpassed in Paris.

Although he had a tender and singular devotion to all the mysteries of our Faith, those of the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation, the sources of all the others, were the subjects of his more special adoration and devotion. We should have the piety of this holy priest, to give an idea of that which he had for the sacrament of the love of a God who wished to be with his own, and even to the end. On entering a holy place that Jesus Christ honored by His presence, he always knelt on both knees, and with a demeanor so humble that it seemed he would willingly have abased himself to the centre of the earth, the better to testify his reverence. His modesty was such that one would have supposed that he saw Jesus Christ visible. He avoided speaking in churches, and if any one, whether bishop or prince, wished to speak but one word to him, he would endeavor to lead him from the church, and he did so with so much grace and ease that no one could be offended. When going out, in the city, he saluted, before his departure,

the Master of the House, according to his own expression; on his return, he would again salute Him, and he has left this practice to his children. It may readily be conceived that a man so full of love for the adorable sacrament of our altars, would be extremely sensible to the outrages perpetrated towards it in his time of heresy and licentious soldiery. Penances, bitter tears, mortifications, considerable presents to different churches, made up his modes of offering reparation. Such enormous scandals were not needed to afflict the holy man. He could not endure to see one of his brethren salute the Holy Sacrament in an abrupt or careless manner. He compared those who make but half a genuflection to puppets, whose reverences are without understanding or heart. Not that he placed piety in these exterior signs, but because he was persuaded that these exterior signs are always manifested by those professing piety.

To the tender devotion which Vincent had for the Son of God, we must join that which he had for the Divine Mother. In order to celebrate worthily the Feasts of the Queen of Heaven, he, and all in his house, fasted on the Vigils. On the Feasts, he would officiate with great solemnity, and would propose to his children, the examples of virtue, which accorded with the mystery honored by the Church. Wherever he was, whether with the prince, or elsewhere, as soon as he heard the Angelus ring, he would, unless in Paschal-time,

or on Sunday, go on his knees, in order to recite it with more respect. Following the example of St. Bernard, he always called on the "Star of the Sea," amidst the storms which so frequently agitated his life. "Each one of our days," would he say, "is stamped as the coin with the protection of her, who wishes to be our good mother when we wish to be her children." Finally, to be well convinced that Vincent de Paul was a zealous servant of Mary, it suffices to remark that he did all he could to extend and perfect her veneration. With this view, he engaged his children to honor her every day of their lives, to imitate her virtues as far as they can, and to make her revered by all to whom they may have an opportunity to make known her greatness, her power with God, and her tenderness for sinners. In all his own Missions, and in those given by his brethren, he wished that the Faithful might always be made to feel the gratitude and love they owe to this sublime being, who, though infinitely beneath God, sees all but Him beneath her; in fine, among the many companies, assemblies, and associations, of which he was the founder, there is not one which he did not place under the special protection of the Holy Virgin.

This devotion for the Mother of the Son of God, and for the Saints, had but one and the same source, which was to glorify God in the persons of those whom He had so much honored. He

honored the Apostles particularly, since they had the happiness to see and touch the Word made Flesh, and to seal with their blood the words of life. His Angel Guardian was always present to his mind. Every day he offered some prayer to him; this is another practice he has bequeathed to his children, since, every time they enter or leave their rooms, they have not only to go on their knees, as we have already said, but they are to pay some honor, also, to the Angel that God has given charge to watch over and guard them.

His affection for St. Joseph was equal to that St. Teresa felt for the worthy Spouse of the Mother of God. He made him the Patron of his primary seminaries. He congratulated the superior at Genoa for having had recourse to the mediation of this glorious Patriarch, in order to obtain laborers capable of cultivating the vineyard of our Lord. He wished, in his apostolic tours, to induce the people to have confidence "In this faithful guardian of the *Immaculate Mother of Jesus*," as he styled him. We must not omit here, that the servant of God made it a law with himself, to solace by his prayers, and by the sacrifice of propitiation, those faithful souls who are expiating, after death, the remnants of their frailties. He frequently exhorted his brethren to this pious duty. "These dear deceased are the living members of Jesus Christ," would he say to them, "they are animated by His grace, and are sure of participat-

ing, one day, in His glory; by these titles we are obliged to love, serve and assist them with all our power." Vincent was very far from forgetting the benefactors of his congregations. Every day his community says the Pslam *De Profundis*, three times: after the particular examen before dinner and supper, and again after the general one in the evening. It is grateful in a numerous community never to take their meals without having prayed for those who provided them.

XIV.

HIS MEEKNESS.

This virtue, so well calculated to gain hearts, was, perhaps, that one which it had cost Vincent most to acquire. Of a splenetic temperament, and active mind, he was naturally choleric. He labored, at first, to repress the emotions of anger within him, but the violence he did himself in his interior appeared in the outward man, giving him a sharp, melancholy air. He studied his own heart seriously, and saw what was wanting to him; he had recourse to the Supreme Being, who disposes of His own as He pleases, and who can reform nature by His grace. He encouraged himself by the example of St. Francis de Sales, whose extreme

meekness struck him in his first conversation with that prelate; in fine, by force of vigilance, he became so meek and affable that he would have been the first man of his age under these heads, if his age had not seen the holy Bishop of Geneva. "In seeing Mr. Vincent," said Mr. de Fenelon, Archbishop of Cambray, "one could believe he saw St. Paul conjuring the Corinthians by the meekness and modesty of Jesus Christ."

It costs us little to practice meekness, in our intercourse with those who manifest it toward us; pagans do as much; but to practice it towards those who offend and contradict us, and who will listen to nothing, is the effect of a virtue superior to nature, and this was the effect of that of St. Vincent de Paul. He was obliged to confer frequently, and on the same day, with the high-born and the lowly, the intelligent and the stupid, with the scrupulous, and with proud philosophers; in a word, with every kind of mind that can be conceived in gradation, from the royal throne to the shepherd's cabin. He recalled to every one the idea of the Savior conversing among men; no alteration in his countenance, no harshness in his words, no sign of weariness in his gestures He has been known to interrupt his conversation with persons of rank, to repeat the same thing five times to some one who could not understand, and to say it the last time with as much tranquility as the first. He has been seen listening, without a sha-

dow of impatience, to poor people, who spoke badly, and for a long time, giving to their words the little good sense which they could be made to convey. He has been known, though overwhelmed with business, to allow himself to be interrupted thirty times, in one day, by scrupulous persons, who would only repeat the same thing in different terms; he would listen to them, even to the end, with an unalterable patience; would sometimes write down, with his own hand, what he had said, and explain more at length when they could not understand well at once; finally, to interrupt his office, or his sleep, so as to lose no opportunity of making a sacrifice, which sometimes costs more to a man of good sense than to any other.

It was principally with heretics that meekness seemed to him most necessary. He said, that in lively discussions, the opposing party feels at first that the opponent would like to gain the advantage over him, and overcome him, therefore he prepares not to recognize truth, but to combat it; these debates instead of opening the mind to its errors, generally close the avenues to the soul, which meekness and affability would have opened. He adduced the example of St. Francis de Sales, as a sensible proof of this truth, since that prelate, though very skillful in controversy, had brought over more heretics by his meekness than by his science; and so, that the Cardinal du Perron was

accustomed to say, that he himself could easily refute the innovators, but that it belonged to M. de Sales, of Geneva, to convert them. Our Saint concluded this subject in these words: "In truth, I have never known a heretic that was converted by force of argument, or by subtlety of reasoning, but of many who have been converted by meekness; so much power has this virtue to gain men to God!"

The servant of God was still more firmly persuaded that it is only by meekness that fruit can be reaped in country missions. Render thyself affable to the assembly of the poor, is the counsel of Holy Writ. "*Congregationi pauperum affabilem te facito.*" "This ought to be our rule," said he to his brethren. "Otherwise the poor will feel repulsed; they will not dare to approach us. They will think us either too severe, or else too great lords for them; thus the work of God will fail, and we will not fulfill the designs which He has upon us. If God has given a blessing to our missions, it has been remarked that this is owing to our having acted kindly towards all sorts of persons; and if it has pleased God to make use of the most miserable of men, your superior, to effect the conversion of some of the heretics, they have owned, themselves, that it was on account of his meekness and cordiality. The convicts, also, with whom I have lived, were not to be gained otherwise; and whenever I have chanced to speak

sharply, I have spoiled all; on the contrary, when I have praised them for their resignation, when I have pitied them in their sufferings, telling them they were happy to have their purgatory in this world, and kissing their chains, then, have they listened to me, given glory to God, and entered the way of salvation. I entreat you to aid me to return thanks to God for this, and to supplicate that He may be pleased to bestow on all of us missionaries the grace to become habituated to treat our neighbor, and even hardened sinners, meekly, whether in public or in private, without ever using reproaches, invectives, or rude words against any one. I doubt not but that you will endeavor to avoid this bad way of serving souls, which, instead of attracting, exasperates and estranges. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the inexhaustible suavity of angels and of men. It is by practising this same virtue that we ought to follow Him, and to conduct others in the same way."

The Saint founded his meekness upon two principles; first, the word and example of the Savior; secondly, the knowledge he had of human weakness. Regarding the first, he said that meekness and humility are two sisters, which harmonize well together; that Jesus Christ has taught us to unite them when he said: "*Learn of me because I am meek and humble of heart.*" He sustained these words by His Divine example, since our Savior selected for disciples those who were

unpolished and subject to many defects, in order to teach those who hold His place the manner in which they ought to act towards those of whom they have charge. No person can see the meekness that He practiced in his passion, without being won to follow His example. He gave the name of friend to the most wicked heart that ever was, and suffered, without a single murmur, the cruelties exercised on Him, by a deicidal rabble, that spit in His face, and insulted Him amidst His sorrows. "O, Jesus, my God," Vincent exclaimed, "what an example for us, who have undertaken to imitate you! What a lesson for those who wish to suffer nothing, or else are disquieted and soured when they suffer!" Concerning the second principle, Vincent said that it is as natural for man to commit faults, as it is for briars to bear prickly thorns; that the just man himself falls seven times, that is to say, several times; that the mind has its maladies as well as the body; and that since a man is often a great exercise of patience to himself, he should not be surprised that he exercises the patience of others; and that, as St. Gregory the Great observes, true justice knows compassion, but neither anger nor hastiness. Hence, our Saint concluded that it is necessary to exercise meekness in our intercourse with others in this life; that the words which wound us, are more frequently the sallies of nature than the effect of malice, that the wisest are

not exempt from passions, and that their passions sometimes draw from them certain expressions of which they repent a moment after; that wherever we may be, we shall always find something to suffer, and at the same time an opportunity to merit, wherefore it is well to acquire a stock of meekness, since, without this virtue, we suffer without merit and even endanger our salvation.

"Meekness," adds our Saint, "has three principal acts. The first represses the movements of anger, and the sallies of passion, which trouble the soul and flame out in the countenance, making it change color. A meek man ceases not to feel the first emotion of passion, because the movements of nature precede those of grace; but he remains silent, so that passion may not carry him away, and if, notwithstanding his efforts, there appears some alteration in his exterior, he soon recovers his natural serenity. When obliged to reprehend, to punish, he follows only the dictates of duty, never those of anger. He imitates in this the Son of God, who called St. Peter, Satan; who, for the same reason, treated the Jews as hypocrites, on ten or twelve occasions, and who overturned the tables of the money changers, and yet did all these things with perfect tranquility, whereas, a man without meekness would have done them with anger. A superior who acts meekly will produce much fruit in souls, because he will be actuated by reason, not humor. Those

who govern others, cannot be too mindful of the consideration the Savior evinced for His brethren. No one wishes to be corrected with severity; but says, almost word for word, with the Royal Prophet: 'Chastise me not in thy anger.'

"The second act of meekness consists in great affability—in that serenity of countenance, which re-assures those who accost us. There are persons, who, with a cheerful and agreeable countenance, give satisfaction to everybody, and seem, at the first interview, to offer their hearts to you, and to demand yours. Others, on the contrary, present themselves with reserved manner, and contracted, frowning countenance, which appal and disconcert. The Missionaries, who, by their state of life, are obliged to treat with the poor country people, with those aspiring to Holy Orders and with persons making the exercises of a Retreat, should labor to acquire those insinuating manners which gain all hearts. Otherwise, they will produce no fruit; they will become like barren earth, producing nothing but thistles.

"Finally, the third act of the virtue of meekness, consists in banishing from the mind all reflections on the trials others give us, or the bad treatment we have received. We should accustom ourselves to turn our thoughts from the offense committed against us, and to excuse the offender, saying that he acted precipitately, that the first movement of passion hurried him on; above

all, we should never answer such as wish to exasperate us. We should even treat those meekly who are least considerate in our regard; and if they go so far as to insult us, even striking us in the face, we must offer all to God, and suffer this injurious treatment for His love; we must resist emotions of anger, preferring meek words to any others, because one meek word can convert a hardened sinner, while, on the contrary, a harsh one suffices to offend. I have never spoken harshly when reprehending, except three times in my life, and, although I then believed I had some reason to do so, I have always regretted it, because I succeeded badly on those occasions; while I have always obtained whatever I desired by meekness."

Though meekness charms wherever it is, it lent to our Saint an inexpressible degree of artlessness, spirituality and wisdom, which rendered it difficult to withstand him. One day, as he was in the company of several persons of rank, one of the number uttered several imprecations, and even said he wished the devil had him. At these words, Vincent very kindly enfolded him in his arms, and said, smilingly: "O, my dear Sir, I will keep you for God; it were a pity the devil should have you." These few words edified the company, and touched the person to whom they were addressed; he promised to abstain henceforth, from using like expressions.

The Saint's meekness did not weaken that firm-

ness and vigor of mind, so indispensible in his position. "As no one," he tells us, "is more constant in good than he who practises habitual meekness; so those, on the contrary, who allow themselves to be hurried away by anger, or other passions, are generally the most inconstant. The first are like those rivers which flow along noiselessly, yet constantly, never drying up; the second are like torrents; at first, they make a great noise, but their strength passes with the outbreak. They act by whim, and, therefore, act badly. What, then, is to be done, in order to succeed well in the affairs of God? Imitate, everywhere, the example set us by that same God. Go, like Him, energetically to the end proposed, but reach it by ways full of suavity and meekness; "*Attingit a fine usque ad finem fortiter, et disponit omnia suaviter.*"

Vincent joined energy with meekness. He had no other support than his virtue, no other rule of action than his faith. He spoke the truth in the midst of the court, and never made promises which his conscience would not permit him to fulfill. He resisted the most powerful solicitations. Gratitude and affection found him equally inexorable, so that during his long life he never once said *yes*, when duty obliged him to say *no*. We could produce a number of testimonies in proof of this, but as they would all amount to about the same, we will content ourselves with three. The

first is that given by Mr. de Lamoignon. After having said that the esteem in which our Saint was held by the public caused the Queen Mother to name him as one of her council of conscience, he added: "The servant of God spoke on the most trying occasions with a firmness worthy of the apostles; no human considerations could engage him to dissemble, even ever so little, and he made use of the confidence of the great only to inspire them with the sentiments they ought to conceive." The second testimony was given by Mr. de Méliand, the former Bishop of d'Alet: "Common report," said he, in his letter to Clement XI., "apprises us that Vincent, in the royal councils, possessed such a degree of fortitude and constancy as rendered him proof against supplications and threats; and whatever rank and dignity those might possess, who aspired to the prelacy, or to benefices, he would never consent, when he knew, (and he never failed to know) that they were unworthy." In fine, the third testimony shall be that of Mr. de Fenelon, Archbishop of Cambray. He said, in a letter to Clement XI.: "The gift of discerning spirits and that of fortitude shone in the man of God, to such a degree as was almost incredible; that in the councils of Anna of Austria, he minded neither the hatred nor favor of the great—only the interests of the Church."

Certain facts in his life make it evident that Vincent de Paul had no other fear on earth than

the fear of God. We read, in his life, that he preferred being looked upon by the best of his friends, as being ungrateful, rather than interest himself in the restoration of an Abbess, not altogether edifying. We read that he was superior to all rules of mere human prudence, to such a degree, that he went to visit a father, not to congratulate him on the nomination of his son to the episcopacy, but to conjure him not to allow his son to occupy a place of which he was so unworthy. He closed the doors of those monasteries, of which he was superior, to the entrance of princesses and ladies of the first rank, taking upon himself all the odium accruing from these refusals, and thereby exposing himself to every species of resentment. Many traits of this kind, in his life, prove that Vincent was, like the prophets of old, as firm as a wall of brass, yet his firmness prevented not his following the ways of meekness.

XV.

HIS EQUALITY OF TEMPER.

That state of body and soul which enables a person under circumstances of every nature, to remain calm and self-possessed: "Is less," said Vincent, "the consequence of possessing a particular virtue, than a state which indicates the assemblage of all virtues. It is a ray, a flashing out, on the exterior, of the interior peace and beauty of the soul." A Christian, who, by labor, mortification, and conformity to the will of God, has attained to this state, is master of himself, and preserves his peace of mind, in all the events of life. Whatever is said or done to him, disturbs him not. He may be overwhelmed with business, receive the most unforeseen chastisements from the Divine Hand, see himself forgotten, contemned, crushed, by those he had cherished and loaded with honors, still his heart is always at peace, his brow equally serene, his words directed by moderation. Even the tone of his voice changes not, and he seems to be, in advance, what the elect will be in that happy state, in which there is neither alteration nor vicissitude.

This is the portraiture of our Saint's character, from his tenderest years; even to extreme old age—his piety, religious exactness, and charity were

always genuine. No intervals of virtue, nor shades in fervor, so common in others, were remarked in him. He always advanced with equal rapidity in the way of perfection, attracting all to his imitation.

To this most necessary species of tranquility, we must join that which the Saint evinced in the execution of that large number of enterprises, which he formed for the benefit of Church and State. He applied himself incessantly to the service of the poor, the instruction of the people, and the means of perfecting the ecclesiastical state; he abandoned not one good work, when he wished to commence a better; he sustained all and advanced them to their completion. Contradictions, crosses, persecutions, strengthened his courage instead of shaking it. He constantly willed in himself the accomplishment of the will of God,but he willed it with that peace which is only the heritage of great souls.

His tranquility followed him amidst all that variety of employments which he exercised. Honors produced no difference, either in his manners, or exterior conduct. The contagious air of the court made no impression on him. Prelates, ecclesiastics, courtiers, and other persons, rendered him the greatest honor; he received these honors with profound humility, and great meekness. A Bishop, finding him always quite as humble, and well-disposed to render services to all who required them, as he had been before he was called to the court, gave a portraiture of him in two words, conveying great depth of meaning: "*Mr. Vincent is always*

Mr. Vincent." But there is nothing better calculated to discover his equality of temper than the disgraces and misfortunes he experienced. These rocks in life, for so they may be called, which have proved so fatal to the virtue of many, only caused his to shine with new lustre. He experienced more losses in ten or twelve years, than ordinarily happen to others, during a century. Several of his houses had no other revenues than incomes from taxes, rent on coaches, and other like foundations, and he was sometimes informed of these having failed them, during three, six, and sometimes twelve months. At times he would be told that one of the farms had been plundered; death would sweep from him seven or eight of his best laborers, one after another, in countries, too, where it was difficult, even impossible, to supply their places. In all such conjunctures which, when thus rapidly succeeding one another, are well calculated to make one lose equilibrium of mind, he was only heard to exclaim: "*God be praised; we must submit to His will, and accept all that He is pleased to send us.*"

We have several remarkable traits of the equality of his temper. Once, a few steps from his door, he received a blow from a man with whom, in passing, he had come in collision. The Saint, throwing himself on his knees, presented the other cheek to him who had so outrageously treated him, and begged his pardon. The inhabitants of the suburbs, who had witnessed the insult, and who had a great deal of respect for Vincent, their Lord and Father, gather-

ed around him. At a single sign from him, his unjustifiable assailant would have been thrown into prison, but either through affright, on account of the shouts and threats of the multitude, or else from a feeling sense of the unworthy treatment he had given the holy priest, excited by Vincent's profound humility, the offender threw himself at the feet of the holy man, and in his turn, begged pardon. This fact is recorded in the life of our Saint by Abelly, and in the process of his canonization.

A nobleman, who visited him to obtain a benefice for his son, being unsuccessful, treated him at the door, very unbecomingly, in the presence of all who happened to be there. "You are right, my dear Sir," said the holy man, throwing himself on his knees, "I am a wretched sinner." The nobleman, confounded at so unexpected a movement, rushed into his carriage. The Saint arose and hastened after him, making his bow, as usual. Such conduct is painful to nature! How much piety is required to be prepared to act thus, and what evenness of temper!

XVI.

ESTABLISHMENT OF HIS CONGREGATION.

The fruit produced by the first missions of St. Vincent, convinced Madam de Gondi, who had been witness to their effects, that by perpetuating them she would contribute much to the glory of God. Hence she formed the design of giving an endowment of sixteen thousand francs, to some religious community, on condition that missions should be given once every five years, throughout her domains. She entrusted Mr. Vincent, her director, with making the proposal to those whom he judged most suitable for carrying out the holy enterprise. Vincent spoke of it to the Rev. Father Charlet, provincial of the Jesuits, who wrote to Rome about it, but was not permitted to accept the endowment. He proposed it to the priests of the Oratory, who were unwilling to accept it. He met with no better success with superiors of other communities. Some alleged fewness of numbers, others that they already had previous engagements enough, without forming new ones. Providence had its own ends; it permitted this general refusal, only because it would give to the church a new company of apostolic men, devoted not only to the instruction of the country people, but to the training of those for

the holy ministry, to whom the salvation of that same people would one day be confided. The Countess of Joigni awaited, cheerfully, the moment fixed by God, and to begin to follow, as well as she could, the interior attraction which drew her to this great work, she made her will, bequeathing the sum of sixteen thousand francs, for founding the mission of which we have spoken. She added that this foundation would be carried into effect whenever Mr. Vincent *should judge it expedient.*

For more than seven years had Vincent sought some one who would accept this endowment, when the Countess thought seriously about settling it upon her director; she judged that, as almost every year, a number of doctors and virtuous ecclesiastics joined him, to labor in the country, they might form a kind of perpetual community, provided they could procure a house, into which they could retire and live together. She spoke to the Count of Joigni, who, far from opposing the pious intentions of his spouse, wished to contribute to them, and to become with her, a founder of the new institute. The approbation of the Archbishop of Paris was necessary, but that prelate, brother to the Count of Joigni, General of the Galleys, willingly concurred to the establishment of a house, which he judged would be very beneficial to his diocese. He stopped not at a simple approbation, but, unable to do better, gave Vincent de Paul the charge of a college, founded in 1648, under the title of *Bons-Enfans.* This college, to which St. Louis had be-

queathed sixty thousand francs yearly, now reduced to eighteen thousand, possessed only an extremely poor chapel, some apartments wanting repairs, and in its vicinity a number of houses falling into ruins.

Such was the cradle which God wished for a congregation, which, after being spread through part of the provinces of the Kingdom, multiplied in Italy and Poland, where, by the mercy of God, it is equally dear to clergy and people. It was on the first of March, that Vincent was given charge of the college. He had received his licentiate in canon law, some time before. The sixth of the same month, Anthony Portail, one of his first companions, took possession of the college, in his name. The following year, 1625, the General of the Galleys, and his Countess, completed this important business. On the seventeenth of April, they made their contract for the foundation; soon after Vincent withdrew to the college of *Bons-Enfans*. This asylum was, in his eyes, what a good port is to a pilot, who comes from a sea as dangerous in the great calm as during the tempest. He thought his life, heretofore, had been one of imperfections, which the turmoil and perplexity of the world had not allowed him to discern; to make amends, he consecrated himself specially to the laboring for his own sanctification, and that of the people.

As we have intimated above, the Servant of God was followed to the college by Mr. Anthony Por-

tail, priest of the diocese of Arles, who had, for nearly fifteen years, been his declared disciple. This first companion of Vincent had no sooner become acquainted with his elevated maxims than he joined the holy man, and death alone separated them. He had much intercourse with his spiritual father. As it was impossible that our two priests should be able long to bear up against the fatigues of the missions, and satisfy the devotion of the people, they asked a third to join them. The three went from village to village, catechising, exhorting and giving all the other exercises of the mission. Such feeble beginnings were far from presaging the success that followed. Twenty years after, Vincent could only speak of it in terms equally indicative of surprise and gratitude: "O, my Savior, who could have ever believed that we could come to our present position? No one can call that work human, upon which no man had even thought. For neither poor Mr. Portail, nor myself, thought of it, we were far from conjecturing what it would become."

The Archbishop of Paris, who venerated Vincent de Paul, authentically confirmed his institute under the clauses and conditions indicated in the contract of the foundation. Some months later, Messrs. du Coudray and de la Salle, both originally from Picardy, offered to live and labor under the guidance of the Saint. So small a number of evangelical laborers was sadly disproportionate to the spiritual necessities of the country people. The harvest was so abundant, that the father of the family was

asked for new laborers. Providence having given birth to the congregation, took care to increase its numbers. Four new priests came to share the labors of Vincent. These missionaries, to whom God imparted a share of the sacerdotal spirit, which filled the Saint, were the pillars on which God wished to rest the new edifice.

The King, having been informed of these happy beginnings, confirmed the contract of foundation. By letters patent of the fourth of May, 1627, he authorized the association of the priests of the mission. He allowed them to establish themselves in whatever place in the kingdom it should seem good to them, and to receive all legacies, alms, or any other gifts that might be made to them.

Urban VII., charmed that under his pontificate, sheep—the most neglected of the flock of Jesus Christ—had found disinterested pastors, whose first duty it was to lead them into good pastures, created the company associated to our holy priest into a congregation. His bull is dated, January 12th, 1632.

Whilst God took in hand thus decidedly the interests of His servant, the holy priest forgot not those of God. He divided his small troop into different bodies. Before their setting out, he filled them with that divine fire with which he was consumed; he sent them where he believed their presence was most needed. He was not content, like Moses, to raise his hands upon the mountain, he also combatted in the plain, and generally in the

most trying places. The province of Lyons, whose wants he knew, fell to him, as we learn from a letter to Madam de Chantal. If he accomplished a great good, his priests did not do less, in all the places in which they labored.

Mr. le Bon, prior of St. Lazarus, who recognized in Vincent de Paul, a man according to the heart of God, offered him his house in 1630. Vincent refused it. In 1631, the prior renewed his entreaties. The servant of God represented to him that so grand an establishment could not fail to create an excitement, that he disliked *éclat*, that he had with him but few priests, and that he dreaded nothing more than to be talked about. Mr. de Lestoc, pastor of St. Lawrence, in his account of the forming of the great establishment, declares that he cannot express the earnestness with which they pursued Vincent de Paul, to induce him to consent. At the expiration of a year, Mr. le Bons and himself were no farther ahead than on the first day. Entreaties repeated more than thirty times, so far from conquering his repugnance, had not even induced him to visit the house which they wished to present to him. Finally, the prior of St. Lazarus, grieved to find so much resistance, said to Vincent, one day, with some emotion: "Sir, you are a very strange man. There is not one, who wishes you well, who does not counsel you to accept my offer. In affairs of this nature, it is wisdom not to trust wholly to one's self. Tell me, from whom do you take counsel? What friend have you in Paris, whose ad-

vice you most willingly follow, and in whom you have most confidence? I will recur to him—if he agree with me, you will follow his advice, if with you, I will cease my importunities."

Vincent, who could not demur to so just a proposal, pointed out Mr. Duval, who had been his director, since the death of Mr. de Bérûlle, and it appeared from this occurrence, that the Saint did nothing of moment without consulting him. Mr. le Bon was delighted at this announcement. Dr. Duval conferred with him on the conditions under which Vincent, and his priests, were to be received into the house of St. Lazarus. These preliminaries, which are usually so tedious in arranging, did not delay them a moment. The Doctor knew the liberal and grateful spirit of the servant of God. He entered into his views perfectly, and granted the prior more, perhaps, than he would have asked. Vincent did not wish that the old religious should sleep in the same dormitory with the missionaries. He feared that the religious of Mr. le Bon, unaccustomed to severe discipline, should teach the missionaries relaxation in points deemed unimportant by them. "I would prefer," said he, "to remain in our poverty, rather than to frustrate the designs of God upon us." The holy priest would have preferred to sacrifice the temporal advantages presented to him, rather than to put an obstacle to the spiritual good of his company. He felt that his priests could render the greatest service to the church, but he further felt that a dissipating or

distracting intercourse could not fail to weaken them, and it was on this subject that he said, more than once: "True missionaries should be Carthusians in the house, and apostles when abroad."

God increased the children of his servant, and the seminary, which he had established, furnished him yearly, not only with subjects to replace those who had died, but with some to send, from time to time, to those who desired priests. He had already several establishments in the different cities of the kingdom. He thought he ought to convoke a general assembly for the good of his congregation. The opening one was held on the thirteenth of October, 1642. Several rules were made, worthy of the wisdom of those who composed the assembly. The servant of God, who had never before grieved any one, grieved the whole assembly. Well persuaded that there was not one in his congregation, who was not better suited for governing than himself, he went on his knees before his priests, and, after having asked pardon for the faults which he believed he had committed, during his generalship, he besought them, in a voice choked by sobs, to proceed to a new election. He then withdrew to allow them freedom of choice.

The deliberation was soon ended. Opinions were unanimous. Hardly had they recovered from the surprise, which such a proceeding caused, when they sent deputies to the holy priest to tell him that the assembly could not consent to his retiring, and that it conjured him to resume his place, but, not-

withstanding all the reasons they alleged, and all their entreaties, he remained unalterably fixed in his first resolution. He protested that he was no longer superior, and in turn conjured them to confer on him the favor of substituting another. Upon this protestation, the whole assembly went in a body to entreat him to sacrifice his inclination to the necessities of the company, and to resume a duty, of which he had, heretofore, worthily acquitted himself. The humble Vincent said everything he could to bend them; they, on their side, all that they could to make him yield. As this struggle, turning on the virtue of both parties, was likely to continue, the gentlemen finding they they prevailed nothing, exclaimed: "You wish, then, that we should proceed to the election of a superior. Well, we elect you, and be assured, as long as God preserves you on earth, we will have no other." The Saint made yet further attempts, but seeing that they succeeded no better than the first, he bowed his head, and resumed the burden God had placed on his shoulders. He asked the help of the prayers of the assembly, assuring them that no higher act of obedience could have been enjoined him. The community promised never to forget him before God, and voluntarily renewed its promise of obedience to him.

Vincent knowing, from his own experience, to what dangers the Christian slaves of Tunis, Algiers, Bisertus, and other cantons of Barbary, were exposed, thought seriously of procuring for them that

help which he had not found in his own captivity. Julian Guérin, born in the diocese of Bayeux, a man, who, before he joined Vincent de Paul, had known how to sanctify himself in the profession of arms, was the one to whom the Saint gave the department of Tunis,—it would have been difficult to make a better choice. The apostolic man produced wonderful fruits. If God gave him not the crown of martyrdom, He honored him, with that due to the most heroic charity. He had not been four years in Barbary, when, by close contact with the slaves stricken with the plague, he was himself attacked by it, and terminated a holy life by a death precious in the sight of the Lord. Happily, for the Christians of Africa, he had obtained permission the year before, from the Dey, who is King of Tunis, for a second priest to come from France, to aid in reaping a harvest too abundant for one man, and Vincent, who, when he was consoling the miserable, counted no exertion too much, had immediately sent John Vacher, a priest of the diocese of Paris. This was that incomparable man, who, after having labored for thirty-three years for the salvation of the slaves, and also of the Turks of Tunis and Algiers, finally had the happiness to be placed at the mouth of the cannon, and to be the first of the children of Vincent de Paul, in that infidel country, to shed his blood for Jesus Christ. The lives of more than twenty amongst them, which remain in manuscript, in the archives of St. Lazarus, could not, if they were published, but edify very much the pious and

religious, but it would be to lessen the memory of those heroic Christians, to sketch here an account of their lives.

The congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome, having seen the great good effected by the Children of Vincent, charged the Pope's nuncio to engage the Saint to send some of his priests to the island of Madagascar. To fertilize that barren country, Vincent chose two excellent laborers. One was Nacquart de Champ-Martin, the other, Gondrée. In a letter, which he wrote to them, the father evinced a holy envy of the happiness of his children, and if he had been his own master he would have shared the dangers and glory of so exalted a ministry. He gave them a high idea of their vocation. "It supposes," said he, "a total self-sacrifice, a perfect confidence in God, a courage superior to all dangers, a faith as firm as that of Abraham, a charity like that of St. Paul, and all the virtues that shone in St. Francis Xavier."

After a voyage of six months and a half, the missionaries arrived in Madagascar. They announced the Kingdom of God. Mr. Gondée succumbed under the fatigue. The French of the island shed tears over his tomb,—even the heathens assisted at his obsequies. To repair this loss, Vincent sent five priests, one after the other. On their arrival in the island, they found but the ashes of Mr. Nacquart, who, like another Joseph, would have received them as his brothers, and, like Moses, would have led them into the frightful wastes of the solitude.

Four missionaries died in a little while. Mr. Bourdaise alone survived. He died soon after the time his letter was received announcing the death of all his brother laborers. Every letter received at St. Lazarus, about this time, bore the seal and impress of death. Vincent had just lost seven of his children in the city of Genoa, where their services to those infected with the plague, had finally consumed them. He saw himself on the eve of losing all those who had been laboring in the Hebrides. Some of them had been loaded with chains by the order of Cromwell, and the rest could neither restrain their zeal, nor follow its impulses with impunity.

So many blows, felt so sensibly at an age in which man's vigor is exhausted, would have naturally sufficed to conduct Vincent de Paul to the tomb, but in his submission to the decrees of Providence, he found resources superior to nature's laws. If he bent for a moment, like the palm before an impetuous wind, he soon rose again and appeared as usual. Some of his friends advised him to give up the missions of Madagascar. They told him they thought the time of God's mercy had not yet come for it, and that if God had had special designs of salvation for its people, He would have spared those who could have made them embrace the faith; but these arguments made no impression on him. "The universal Church," he answered, "has been founded by the death of the Son of God, confirmed by that of the apostles, sovereign pontiffs and martyred bishops.

She is increased by persecution, and the blood of martyrs has been the seed of Christians. God is accustomed to prove His own, when He has great designs upon them; He often grants that success to perseverance which He refuses to first efforts. His Divine Goodness declares that He wishes His Name to be known, and the Kingdom of His Son to be established throughout all nations. It is evident that these islanders are disposed to receive the light of the Gospel; six hundred have already been baptised, through the labors of one missionary, whom God has spared; in fine, it would be violating all the laws of reason and charity, to abandon a servant of God who cries for aid, and a people who ask to be instructed." These, and such like motives, determined our Saint to send a new colony of his brethren to Madagascar. Mr. Etienne, while superior there, obtained the crown of martyrdom, and his companions effected an infinite amount of good.

Louisa-Maria de Gonzaga, daughter of Charles, Duke of Mantua, knew Vincent at Paris, where she had lived for a long time. Ladislaus Sigismund IV., King of Poland, had asked a spouse of Anna of Austria. He received this princess, who possessed great qualities; but, as he died soon after, she married, for her second husband, Casimir V. As she knew that Kings reign not in a manner pleasing to God, unless God reigns by them, she wished to establish His empire in the hearts of her subjects, especially in those who had been, heretofore, most

neglected. To effect this, in 1631, she asked our Saint for some priests of his congregation. Vincent was able to send her only a very small number, but the oldest, Lambert-aux-Conteaux, one of his first companions, was himself worth several others. In him, robust health was joined to consummate wisdom, indefatigable labors, and profound humility. Vincent admitted that in losing him, he felt like a man who has lost his right arm.

It was the fate of those whom Vincent sent into foreign countries, to find scarcely anything but crosses. The Polanders were then in the fire of tribulation, and though Casimir, at the head of one hundred thousand men, had fought three hundred thousand Turks and Cossacks, he could not drive from his dominions either the famine or the plague which followed in its train. Both made great ravages in Warsaw, where the people were completely forsaken. Lambert flew to their assistance. The dead had not been interred,—they were left in the streets, or eaten by dogs. There was no order in the city. As soon as any one in a house was attacked the rest would put him into the street, where he was left to die without succor. The poor, workmen, servants, widows and orphans could find neither work, nor any one of whom to ask bread, because the rich had taken flight. In this desolation, Mr. Lambert fitted up three or four different houses, as so many hospitals or shelters. He filled them with the poor, and supported them on alms from the Queen, but his zeal and labors consumed

him. He was snatched away by an illness as short as it was violent. The rest continued to console the afflicted, to serve the poor, to administer the sacraments to the healthy and to the sick, with a courage that Vincent de Paul felt sensibly in his old age.

To give some degree of permanency to the congregation, the Saint convoked the superiors of most of its houses. His first object was to give the finishing touch to the constitutions of the company, which he had formed by means of his own experience, and the advice of the wisest persons of his acquaintance. They enacted several regulations concerning the government and studies of the young seminarians of the congregation, meekness towards lay brothers, means of maintaining them in the humility of their position, good success of missions and of firmness in the tribunal of penance, for, it is well to remark, that Vincent de Paul was an enemy to moral relaxation. He wished his brethren to be inviolably attached to that truly Christian morality, found in the Gospel, and in the writings of the holy fathers and doctors of the church. "I am very glad," wrote he to a superior of Genoa, "that they give public penances in the missions. You will do well to enforce the practice as far as you can—it is equally useful and necessary, but it must be wisely directed—I say wisely directed, because it should not be imposed on all characters, nor for all sins. Act, then, for public sins, according to the orders of the Council of Trent, and to the orders of our lords, the prelates."

Vincent had already established his congregation in more than thirty large cities. Several prelates, not only in France, but in other parts of the Christian world, asked him for laborers from his company, and to establish them in their dioceses, but this wise Founder, who could not furnish them all, refused these requests,—unwilling to embrace anything out of time, or beyond his power. Yet God made this Father of Missionaries reap, even in this life, a part of the fruit of his labors. He gave him the consolation of seeing his spiritual children multiplied like the stars of heaven, and his congregation spread in a little time to different parts of the world. As his supplications tended but to the glory of God, and the salvation of souls, he felt an unspeakable gratitude on seeing that Providence had made use of him to procure all those great blessings, but these excellent works inclined him not to glory in himself, but rather to cast himself down still lower and lower into the consideration of his uselessness and nothingness.

XVII.

INSTITUTION OF THE COMPANY OF THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY.

Nearly seventeen years had elapsed since Vincent de Paul had established the association of charity, in favor of the poor sick. This association, devoted to works of mercy, had passed from the country into the cities, and quite a number of ladies of rank were aggregated to it. But that which rendered the association more brilliant in the eyes of men, rendered it less useful. The first ladies who entered it did so from choice, and they served the poor in person; those who succeeded, did not do so, for the opposition their husbands offered, owing to their fear of the bad air, and the various maladies of the sick, precluded these ladies from acting with that freedom of which they had need. They relied on domestics, and as hirelings are often without affection or skill, the duties of an office which demanded much of both one and the other were daily more and more badly discharged. In order to remedy this they believed it necessary to have servants, whose sole occupation it should be to take care of poor, infirm people, giving them daily those kinds of nourishments and remedies which their sickness

required. This well ordered project failed, principally because they could not find many persons who were willing to engage in the duties of infirmarians, and even after having found some, they were obliged to train them for an employment, which, unquestionably, requires much capacity and virtue.

The holy priest thought he might find in the country such persons as he required to execute this project. He remembered that sometimes during his missions he had met young girls who had no inclination to marry, nor sufficient property to enter religion, who would consecrate themselves to the service of the poor sick. Providence, which had always favored Vincent, because he had always confided in it, did so now. In his missions, soon after, he met with two girls of this description, possessed of good-will. One of them was placed in the parish of San Sauveur, the other in that of St. Benedict. Some others presented themselves, and were placed in that of St. Nicholas du Chordonnet, and in other parishes. The result of this project was far from satisfactory. These young girls, congregated from different places, had no common tie or correspondence in views. Vincent and Mademoiselle Le Gras could only give them a few passing instructions, which, in some cases, were soon forgotten. Those that gave little satisfaction were dismissed, but as no substitutes could be found, the poor were reduced to the same straits as before. It was then felt that to succeed, it would be necessary to have a sufficient number of young persons assem-

bled, and instructed in the service of the sick, and also in the exercises of the spiritual life, for, without these, it was easily seen they could not bear up long in so laborious a state of life, in which night and day it would be necessary to struggle against nature, and overcome its repugnances.

Mademoiselle Le Gras desired nothing more ardently than to consecrate herself to this duty of forming persons to the service of the sick. She wished to do so by an irrevocable vow, but, as was her custom, in important affairs, she consulted her director, and as he always referred such matters to God, she was obliged to moderate her zeal almost two years. During that period the saint begged God not to allow such a sinner, as he believed himself, to be so unfortunate as to mar in any way the work of Providence. He told his penitent several times to do nothing precipitately, and to be persuaded that if she placed all her confidence in God, her hopes would not be frustrated.

These last words were verified. Several young persons offered their services to Vincent—he chose four among them, whom he judged well suited to his holy purpose. He confided them, toward the end of the year 1633, to the care of Mademoiselle Le Gras, who maintained them in her own house, and neglected nothing which could contribute to render them capable of discharging the duties awaiting them. It was soon discerned that God had given His servant great talents for this employment—for her first Daughters, whom the pressing

wants of the poor did not permit her to instruct long, edified all the parishes to which they were sent. The beautiful example set by them made such an impression on several young persons of the same age and sex, that they offered themselves to render their services to Jesus Christ, in the person of His poor.

Such was the commencement of the company of virgins, known under the name of Sisters of Charity, and who now have thirty-four houses in the city of Paris alone. As small as a mustard-seed at its birth, it has now become a great tree. Its roots, having thrived less from contact with earth than with the dews of Heaven, are extended over all parts of France, and even into Poland, and we shall see presently the orphan, so long a time abandoned, the bereaved widow, the soldier covered with wounds, the bashful poor, laboring under every kind of disease, reposing under the salutary shadow of the tree of charity, finding there nourishment, health and life.

Vincent and his pious co-operatrix had neither anticipated nor foreseen a progress so rapid. But when they saw that God, content, as it were, with drawing an outline of His work, was pleased to confide it to their care, that it might be perfected, they worked untiringly. They had no intention, at first, of aiding any in the different parishes but such of the sick as were without succor, because there were no hospitals into which they could be transferred. The designs of God being

more clearly manifested later, the holy founder judged these daughters suited to discharge other duties also; he confided, therefore, the training of the foundlings to them, the instruction of young girls, who would, otherwise, have been deprived of education owing to their poverty, the care of a large number of hospitals, and finally of the galley-slaves. As these different employments make several communities of the came company, the Saint prescribed general and particular rules, for the direction of the entire body, and the different parts composing it. He laid down a great number of regulations, to see whether they would prove practicable, and he resolved on nothing, definitely, that appeared not, after much experience and long practice, both practical and beneficial. Therefore, we may rest assured that the constitutions he drew up for these pious Daughters are a masterpiece of prudence and wisdom.

The Daughters of Charity ought, in the first place, to bear in mind that God has united them in order to honor our Lord, as the source of all charity, rendering Him, in the person of children, the aged, the sick, the prisoner, &c., all the spiritual and corporal services in their power; that although they are not and cannot be religious, because the religious state is not compatible with their employments, they should, however, live as perfect a life as the holiest religious in their monasteries. "They have, ordinarily," said the Saint, "no monastery but the houses of the sick; no cell but a hired room;

no chapel but the parish church; no cloister but the streets of the city, or the wards of the hospital; no enclosure but obedience; no grate but the fear of God; no veil but holy modesty. They have need of much vigilance; they ought, wherever their duties call them, to deport themselves with a degree of recollection, that is not surpassed by the most fervent religious in their cloisters: and as purity, a virtue difficult, and of almost infinite extent, is indispensably necessary to them, since all suspicions, however slight or unfounded they may be, would be more injurious to the society than all other crimes that might be falsely imputed to it, they ought to avoid, by the strictest precautions, all that might prove offensive in the Divine Sight, or to their neighbor. Consequently, they should cherish for one another a respect excluding all familiarity; in their recreations, and at all other times, they should abstain from all childish levity, unbecoming gestures, or expressions, or such amusements as might lead to any immodesty; their vigilance must redouble when charity obliges them to hold intercourse with externs, to treat with persons of the other sex, or to attend the sick; before leaving their house, they should prostrate themselves at the feet of the Son of God, and conjure Him to support their weakness, and on their return they should go on their knees, to thank Him for not having permitted their eyes to fasten upon the vanities of this world."

How many scandals would be removed from religion, if Christian virgins in the world regulated

their conduct by such pure and judicious maxims!—However, the holy man was not satisfied with these. Everything affrighted him that might prove injurious to the innocence of his Daughters. He even forbade their seeing their director out of the sacred tribunal of Penance, except in cases of serious illness; even then, they must be accompanied by one of their sisters, or by a lady of the neighborhood. Idleness, the mother of all vices, especially that of impurity, is strictly forbidden; and as nothing is better calculated to nourish virtue, than the mortification of this body of sin, which always accompanies us, and an inviolable fidelity to all the exercises of a true and solid piety, they have respecting both, rules that exact much, while they seem to exact but little. They do not prescribe the use of the cilice or other austerities of the cloister; but to rise at four o'clock, in winter and summer, to make their mental prayer twice every day, to live very frugally, to drink nothing but water, except in case of sickness; to render the most trying services to the sick; to watch, by turns, during entire nights, to count as nothing, the infection of hospitals, the impoisoned air there breathed, the horrors of death in their attendance on the dying,—such is the kind of mortification enjoined on the Daughters of Charity, and if it is enough for vigorous men, it is certainly sufficient for persons of the weaker sex. As to their exercises of piety, some are laid down in the common rule, others are left between themselves and their confessors. The latter regard the fre-

quentation of the Sacraments to which they ought to approach, if possible, on all Sundays and Festivals, &c.; the former enjoin hearing Mass daily, reciting the Chaplet devoutly, and assisting at pious entertainments, readings, sermons, conferences, &c. These exercises are, however, subordinate to the exercises of charity. At the first cry of the poor they are to hasten to their assistance; but in order that they may not fail in their duty to God, they must occupy themselves during their walk with the things of God, so as to gather, even in public places, those fruits of justice and peace, which Providence will not permit them to gather in retirement.

The rules which Vincent prescribed for the service of the poor, bear the impress of a tender and enlightened charity. Whatever zeal they may have to procure the recovery of health for their patients, they must be still more interested in the salvation of their souls. As the all important thing is a happy journey to eternity, they ought to endeavor to induce the sick to make a good use of the moments that remain to them; inspiring them with a holy horror of their sins and if time will permit, they should be induced to make a general confession of all their sins; if time presses, they should incite them to conceive a sincere sorrow for their past disorders, and a firm resolution rather to die, than to relapse into them. Not to fatigue their patients, whose sufferings have already quite exhausted them, the Sisters of Charity are enjoined to speak little at once, but to return to the subject

from time to time; to induce them to make acts of faith, hope and charity; to pardon or ask pardon of their enemies; to place themselves unreservedly in the hands of God, receiving with resignation from Him either life or death. If the sick recover their health, these holy Daughters engage them to make a good use of their term of convalescence; they endeavor to impress on them, in a sensible manner, that God afflicts the body only to cure the soul; that He has a right to exact from them, that they should consecrate to His service, the days which He has in mercy granted them; in fine, that Heaven and earth are about to witness with what sincerity they have so frequently promised never to offend Him. This is a kind of outline of the rule of conduct marked out to the Daughters of Charity with regard to the poor sick; by which they so manage matters, that the spiritual services they render the sick, prevent not their taking all necessary care of their own health, while it requires also that they acquit themselves of this two-fold function, with a great deal of humility.

These rules, and others like them, after having been practiced during nearly twenty years, were approved by the Cardinal of Retz, Archbishop of Paris. In his letters of erection, this prelate rendered full justice to the Father and his Daughters. He placed the new company under obedience to Vincent de Paul and his successors, the Superiors-General of the congregation of the Missions. The King confirmed the same by his letters-patent,

which are, in themselves, a lasting monument of his piety and of the esteem everywhere entertained for this virtuous community. These letters-patent were confirmed anew, and en-registered on the 16th of December, 1668, in the Parliament of Paris, and eight years after, the same company was confirmed by the Cardinal of Pendôme, legate *à latere* of the Holy Apostolic See, under Pope Clement IX.

Vincent had thought, at first, that few besides those of the middling state of life, could bring themselves to render, personally, the lowest services to all sorts of patients; he seemed to think that God would bless, in a particular manner, services which the poor render to the poor. Such an example as that of Mademoiselle Le Gras, was, as he thought, of very rare occurrence; and he found it difficult to believe that persons of high life could be found possessed of like virtue and activity. Therefore, for several years, only persons of ordinary birth, who had been accustomed, from childhood, to painful labor, either in the cities, or in the country, were received; but young persons, of rank and high life, personally, and through friends, had entreated, again and again, to be partakers of the abjection and merit attached to these employments, hence it was thought unjust to close a door against them, which God seemed to open. Some were received on trial and succeeded in the vocation of their choice.

From that time to the present, young persons, who had been brought up delicately, clothed in

precious stuffs, and more accustomed to command than to obey, have been seen renouncing all the conveniences of life in order to embrace a state, in which nature has much to suffer; honoring, as their masters, the unfortunate, of every description, who would not have been permitted to wait on them in the world; and wearing a coarse habit with more joy than worldly ladies wear their gaudy apparel. The Holy Founder had a particular respect for the Sisters of Charity, of whatever condition they might be. The very name of "servants of the poor," was enough to touch the heart of this Father of all the afflicted. The protection which God accords to those who serve Him in His members, assured him that no accidents will befall them, notwithstanding the dangers to which they may be exposed. He sent them to the armies to take care of wounded soldiers, sometimes as far as Poland, across Germany, and into many heretical countries, without ever fearing for them what he would have apprehended for others. He had ordered them, in their journeys, to be as firm as a rock against everything that might be a snare; he doubted not for an instant but that they would be so, and God heard his prayers. He seemed, sometimes, to promise them that Providence would work miracles in their favor rather than abandon them; and, more than once, has Providence verified his prediction.

The Daughters of Charity make only simple vows; they do not pronounce them until after a trial of five years; and to keep them in proper depend-

ence, and at the same time, to leave them the merit of full liberty, they make them each time for one year. They only renew them, according to the permission which has been granted by the Superior-General, and then on the 25th of March, the day on which Mademoiselle Le Gras pronounced hers, for the first time; the delay of this permission, in any individual case, is the severest penance that can be imposed. Besides the three usual vows of religion, they make a fourth, to serve the poor in the company to which God has called them; and the liberty they have of leaving the congregation has, up to the present, served only to attach them to it by the most inviolable bonds.

As the company of the Daughters of Charity is not less the work of Vincent de Paul, than his congregation, he labored quite as assiduously to inspire them with the sentiments which their name alone is sufficient to impress on them. The great good which he heard of those whom he had sent to Warsaw, caused him to congratulate that community. He profited by the occasion, to exhort them to live in great union: "You are Daughters of Charity," he wrote, "but you will be so no longer, if, feeling aversion or distrust, you live in misunderstandings with one another. God grant that this may never be found among you! . . . You have enough to suffer from externs, and from your employments, without making new crosses for yourselves within doors; these crosses would be the heaviest, and would make your house a little purgatory, whereas love would make it a little paradise."

If Vincent formed his Daughters to charity, he took equal pains to train them to all the virtues of their state. He gave them, at the Mother House, spiritual conferences on the obligations of their state, and the means of discharging them well. It was, no doubt, a genuine source of consolation to this charitable Father to see nearly one hundred of his Daughters assemble from all parts of Paris where they had houses, to hear him speak, nor had he less, when he heard them speak of Heavenly things with that relish and unction which God is pleased to communicate to the simple! For this wise superior was far from desiring to make them learned; however, he thought, that as they were destined to instruct young persons of their own sex, to console the poor and the sick by motives of faith, and to inspire the dying with proper sentiments for appearing before the Tribunal of the Sovereign Judge, they have need of certain talents which would render them useful to others. Hence it was, that he always made several of them speak in the conferences. He, himself, spoke in a style so proportionate to their wants, that they were able to retain the greater part of his instructions. They have collected more than a hundred of his discourses, and find in them now a fountain of life and salvation.

Direction finished what public exhortations had commenced. A certain person expressed his surprise that the missionaries should direct the Daughters of Charity, although their rule permits them

not to direct religious. "I return thanks to God," Vincent replied, "for having made known to you the importance of the reasons which the company has for being averse to serving religious communities, viz: to remove all obstacles to our rendering what we owe the poor. But you desire to be made acquainted with the reasons which have induced us to take charge of the Daughters of Charity, demanding why the congregation, which has for its maxim not to take upon itself the direction of any religious, nevertheless, concerns itself with these Daughters. First, I tell you, my dear Sir, we do not find fault with the duty of assisting religious; on the contrary, we praise those that serve the spouses of Jesus Christ, who have renounced the world and its vanities to unite themselves to their Sovereign Good; but what is good for other priests is not good for us. Secondly, the Daughters of Charity are not religious, for they go and come like seculars. Some of them, in the different parishes, are under the direction of the pastors; and if we have the direction of the house where they are trained to the duties of their calling, it is because it has pleased God to employ our company to form theirs; and, you know, God employs the same causes to preserve things as to give them existence. Thirdly, our little congregation is consecrated to God, to serve the poor in their spiritual and corporal necessities, and it has done so since its commencement; so that at the same time that it has been laboring for the salvation of souls, by missions, it has found out a

means of comforting the sick by charitable confraternities; and the Holy See approves of them, as we see by the bulls of our institute. . . . The Daughters of Charity having, in the designs of Providence, become a means by which God enables us to accomplish what we could not do, of ourselves, by the corporal assistance they render the sick, and the words of instruction and encouragement in the way of salvation, which they say to them for us; we are bound, then, to aid these Daughters to advance in virtue, in order that they may acquit themselves well of their charitable duties. There is this difference between them and religious: the greater number of religious persons have, for their principal and only end, their own perfection; whereas, these Daughters are applied, like ourselves, to procure the salvation and relief of their neighbor; and if I say *with us*, I say nothing contrary to the Gospel, but, rather what is conformed to the custom of the primitive Church; for, our Savior took care of some women who accompanied Him; and from the Acts of the Apostles, we learn that they furnished means of sustenance to the faithful, and bore a part in the apostolic functions. If it is said that it is dangerous to converse with these Daughters, I reply that we have provided against danger, as far as can be done, by ordering that they should never be visited by us in their parish houses, without necessity, nor without the express permission of the Superior; and they, themselves, have a rule requiring them to make their rooms their cloister, and never to allow men to enter them." [19]

XVIII.

ESTABLISHMENT OF A HOSPITAL FOR POOR OLD PEOPLE, AND OF A GENERAL HOSPITAL.

A citizen in Paris, who knew the wisdom of our holy priest, and who had absolute confidence in him, came, in 1633, and told him that he felt himself urged interiorly to do something for the service of God ; that, not to resist the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, he proposed to offer in sacrifice a considerable amount, and that not having any special object in view, he would leave him absolute master in the destination of the money. He moreover assured Vincent that he confirmed, in advance, the pious use he might judge fit to make of it, with no other condition than that of not having his name divulged, as he wished the act to be known to God alone. This request has been most faithfully honored. The name of the pious citizen is not a subject of dispute, as it is wholly unknown. It will be seen, one day, in the book of life,—it is better there than in marble or bronze.

Vincent received the deposit confided to him, and, as usual, had recourse to God to learn what could be done that would tend, most substantially

to the glory of His Name, and to the service of his creatures. After mature consideration he fixed upon a project, and imparted it to the benefactor. He said that every day, there could be seen a number of poor workmen, who, from old age or infirmity, unable to gain their livelihood, were reduced to beggary, and that, in this extremity, only eager for means of subsistence, they generally neglected their salvation. Hence, by establishing an institution to receive them, they would exercise a two-fold charity, that is, to soul and body. The proposal was agreed to, on condition that the Superior-General of the Mission should be charged, in perpetuity, with the temporal and spiritual administration of this class of hospitals,—I say *this class of hospital*, for it was scarcely a hospital, in the usual acceptation of the term, nor has it the privileges of one.

The Saint purchased two houses, and quite a plot of ground, in the Faubourg St. Lawrence, in Paris, in which he fitted up and ornamented a chapel. He provided beds, furniture, and everything needed to conduct a large household. He placed what funds remained in hand on interest, and when all was in readiness, he received forty poor people, both men and women, into this new kind of asylum. He lodged them in separate buildings, but so well contrived that men and women could hear the same Mass and the same reading at table, without speaking to or seeing

one another. He divided their time between exercises of piety and light duties which they were able to perform, and for this, he added to the expenses, already incurred, that of purchasing looms and various working utensils. He named one of the Sisters of Charity to serve them and one of his priests to say Mass for them, to distribute the bread of the word of God and to administer the sacraments. He instructed them himself, recommending fraternal charity, forming their hearts to tender piety towards God, and teaching them to bless, with their dying voices, the adorable hand which had extended to them so signal a mercy, and which, in return, asked only the sacrifice of their last years. The little rules which he, according to his custom, prescribed for them, are so beautiful, so conformable to their situation, that a chief magistrate of Parliament, after having perused them, could not refrain from saying that he had never seen any thing wiser or better arranged.

Vincent called the house "The Hospital of the Holy name of Jesus." He obtained the seal of public authority for this institution without naming its founder. Hence, neither the Archbishop of Paris who gave him the direction of it, nor the King who had the goodness to confirm everything by letters-patent, ever knew the founder of the pious enterprise. It has always been remarked, that although the poor have an aversion

to the very word hospital, that of the Name of Jesus forms an exception in this respect; the places are solicited long before they are vacated, and we have seen persons that seemed worthy of a happier lot, find contentment in their admission to it. The peace, which Vincent de Paul there established, still reigns. Neither haughtiness, nor despotic exercise of authority is experienced, and those entrusted with the care of this good work say still, as said the pious de Merillac: "The poor are our brothers and masters." Happy would it have been for these poor, if such holy institutions could have been sheltered from the vicissitudes of time and the cupidity of man! Even the one of which we have been speaking has already met with such severe reverses, that it is endangered, if charity comes not to its rescue and retrieves not its losses.

When the house of the Name of Jesus was regularly established, several ladies visited it; they wished to see everything, and to have a minute explanation of everything,—the more they saw, the more were they surprised and edified. Forty old people living in harmony, knowing neither murmurs nor contradictions, who, at the first sound of the bell, repaired to their little duties, and still more willingly to exercises of piety; who manifested by their words, and sometimes by tears, that they had never been so contented and peaceful; in a word, forty old people, who, as says the first

biographer of St. Vincent, recalled the memory of the first Christians, and had more the appearance of a religious community, than of an asylum for seculars, appeared as a truly affecting sight to the eye of faith. Unconsciously, every one compared these well behaved poor to that crowd without sense of gratitude, shame or religion, which overran the churches, and often, sword at side, asked for alms in a tone that left little merit to the liberality of the faithful. So much fervor on one side, so much wantonness on the other, formed a contrast that gave rise to many reflections.

One of the most important was that it made Vincent engage to accomplish as much for all the poor of the capital as he had for those at the Name of Jesus. "It would be as easy for him," it was urged, "to feed a large number as a small one; God is visibly with him, imparting His grace and blessing to all his undertakings. Provided he will but put his hand to the work, it will succeed. He has many at St. Lazarus and among the Sisters of Charity, well adapted to aid him." The only anticipated embarrassment was to find a place sufficiently large to accommodate so vast a multitude of different ages and sexes. The ladies who had formed this conception communicated their sentiments to one another. It seemed not too difficult to ladies who had served an apprenticeship under the holy priest. They visited the Name of Jesus several times—admiring the order and arrangement

among those totally unaccustomed to either—their own project appeared more beautiful than ever. They stopped not until they had made the proposition to St. Vincent,—well convinced that the business was the same as accomplished, if he would but lend himself to it—they thought of nothing but of obtaining his assent. At once, one of the ladies promised fifty thousand francs, and another three thousand annually.

Well accustomed as was the Servant of God to great enterprises, the idea of a general hospital for all the poor, in such a city as Paris, astonished him. He bestowed just encomiums on the charity of those who had formed so generous a design, but he represented to them that so important an affair required to be duly weighed, and they must begin by recommending it to God. Eight days after the business was presented to the committee; it was declared that money should not be wanting, and that many persons of distinction would go far to advance so good a work. Finally, the entreaties were so urgent that, contrary to the Saint's inclination, who wished to delay a little, he was obliged at once to deliberate whether the company should take charge of this enterprise. Not a voice took the negative, nor advocated a longer delay. The servant of God was obliged to yield to the torrent, and since it was necessary to have an extensive tract of land to accommodate so vast a crowd of poor, he took upon himself to ask

from the King the house, and all the grounds attached thereto, of Salpétrière, a very large mansion, and better suited to a hospital, since it was not far from the river. The Queen, to whom Vincent had recourse, willingly took upon herself the expediting of the brief of donation.

Such a happy beginning gave courage. "We have an asylum," said the ladies, "the endowment will not be wanting. We are not entirely unprovided with linen or household utensils. Why then defer any longer to execute our project? If the beggars will not come willingly, what danger would there be in forcing them? It is their welfare that we desire, what matter how it is effected?" Thus did some of the most zealous of the ladies reason. They wished that all should be accomplished in a single day, and that every poor person in the streets had a place at Salpétrière, did they wish, in the fullness of their hearts.

Vincent thought it a duty to restrain a zeal which would insensibly become a source of trouble in his assembly. To deal with persons who sinned only through excess of good will, he told them in private, with that gravity, full of sweetness, which always sways the high-born, that the works of God have their beginnings, and their degrees; that when God wished to save Noah and his family, he commanded him to make an ark, which could have been finished in a few months, but which took one hundred years to complete. That He acted in the

same manner towards the children of Israel, with regard to the promised land, into which He permitted them not to enter for forty years, though He could have introduced them thereto in a few days. "So, also," he added, "God having designed to send His Son into the world to apply a remedy to the sin of the first man, which had infected all mankind, why did He wait three or four thousand years? So as not to hurry his works, and that each thing might be done in its own time. And our Lord, coming into the world, could have come at a perfect age, to effect our redemption, without employing thirty years therein. Nevertheless, He willed to be born a little child, and to increase in age like other men, to effect by degrees the accomplishment of this, so incomparable a benefit. Did He not also say, sometimes, speaking of things that He had to do, that His hour was not yet come, to teach us, not to be too eager in those things which depend rather upon God than upon ourselves? He could have established the church throughout the world in His own time, but He was content to found it, and to leave the rest to His apostles and their successors." From all these examples, the holy man concluded that we should be on our guard against the temptation of wishing to do everything at once, since it is necessary to go on sweetly, and to pray to God.

After thus calming their minds, the Saint proposed to do nothing, at first, but by way of expe-

riment, limiting the number of poor to one or two hundred; to take only those who asked admittance and to force no one. He added, that when these saw themselves well treated, they would not fail to engage others to share their good fortune; that then the number might be increased, in proportion as Providence should afford them funds. By acting thus they would be sure of spoiling nothing, while precipitation and constraint might place obstacles to the designs of God; that if this work was inspired by Him, it would succeed, that if it was from man, it would neither be advantageous nor lasting. Vincent judged correctly. Soon he was obliged himself to delay, perhaps longer than he had wished.

It was concluded, on reflection, that a business of such great moment could not be put on a permanent footing, without the sanction of the magistrates; it was determined to present to them the letters-patent of the King, and to have them registered. In great assemblies, as well as in others, each person has his own peculiar view of matters He found some judges, of consequence and influence, who, struck at the great number of vagabonds that were wandering around the city and the suburbs, and at the excitement it would create among this class who reason badly and who have nothing to lose, and fearing the difficulty of accommodating such a crowd of low, lawless beings under the same roof, looked upon the project of

grouping them thus as a beautiful, but chimerical idea, could not, consequently, resolve to authorize it. It needed all the wisdom of Vincent, all the zeal of the ladies, all the credit of Mr. Pomponne de Belliévre, first president of parliament, to surmount an obstacle which they had not expected. It was at last settled, but this arrangement about the support was followed by so many difficulties upon the manner, that during entire years nothing was done but to form several projects, and propose different means to execute the enterprise. Finally, God rewarded the zeal of the ladies, who, during the progress of this tedious discussion, had made very great efforts,—the King passed his edict in April, 1656, and named twenty-six administrators, of approved honor and probity, and hence better calculated to enrich the poor than to become enriched at their expense. Against the first advice of the holy priest, it was resolved that all the beggars scattered through Paris should be obliged either to labor for a livelihood, or enter Salpétrière, which was called, thenceforth, the General Hospital. Vincent confided the house to new directors. The King's edict was confirmed by the parliament on the first of September, and the magistrates had it proclaimed from the pulpit of each parish, in the city, that the hospital would be opened on the seventh of March, 1657, and heralds publicly forbade all beggars to ask alms in Paris. The greater number of these vagabonds

withdrew into the provinces, and out of that host of beggars, accustomed to idleness, there were not, as had been foreseen, more than four or five thousand to profit by the good will shown them. Their number increased afterwards, and the order to which they are brought is the admiration of strangers.

It was a real consolation to the servant of God, and to the ladies of his assembly, to see this great work sustained by public authority. He wrote in these terms, concerning it, to a person in whom he had confidence: "Mendicity is to be banished from Paris; all the poor will be congregated in places suited for their accommodation, instruction and employment. It is a great, and very difficult design, but it is well advanced, thanks to God, and it is approved by all. The King and parliament powerfully support it, and, without consulting me, have designated the priests of our congregation, and the Sisters of Charity, for the service the poor, at the good pleasure of the Archbishop of Paris. We are not, however, decided as yet, to take this duty, because we do not yet know whether God wills it; if we undertake it, it will, at first, only be by way of experiment." Nothing had been wanting to this account, had the holy man added that it was he that had conceived the first idea of this glorious enterprise, who had cleared away the principal difficulties, who had obtained the necessary grounds, who had had the first

necessary articles of furniture made by the workmen of his house, and who had not found so many resources in the ladies of his assembly, if he had not been teaching them during some twenty years, to attempt even the impossible and to succeed.

The Duchess of Aiguillon had labored more zealously than any one else to secure the spiritual direction of the new hospital to the Missionaries, but Vincent, who never engaged in anything prematurely, thought the charge so considerable as to require consideration. Therefore, after many prayers, he assembled the priests of St. Lazarus, to deliberate upon it. He represented the reasons for accepting the employment, and the objections against doing so. All were duly weighed, and it was decided, on good and solid grounds, that they should not take it, and since the letters-patent of the King had conferred this right on the children of Vincent de Paul, they renounced it fully by an authentic act, and left to others the care of discharging the duties of so holy a career, but that this refusal should not prove detrimental to the interests of the poor, for whom the asylum had been established, by the magistrates, the holy priest made Mr. Abelly take charge of the rectorship of the hospital. The commission was painful. It was an extremely uncultivated soil, but those whom Vincent had trained to the duties of the ministry were not persons that could be discouraged. The new rector, aided by some other priests, gave, in

the various houses of the hospital, missions which diffused the spirit of regularity and penance.

Thus did Vincent de Paul accomplish in Paris, what, in former times, St. Chrysostom had vainly attempted in the city of Constantinople; what Henry IV. had unsuccessfully projected, and what Mary de Medicis would have considered as one of the most beautiful features of her regency, if she could have settled it on a permanent footing. This Queen, in 1612, had commenced a kind of general hospital, but it subsisted only six years, according to Lobineau's History of Paris, Vol. II. To do justice to those, who, after Louis XIV., had the greatest share in this prodigious institution, we must add that Cardinal Mazarin gave one hundred thousand livres in one day, and at death left sixty thousand more to it; and that Mr. de Pomponne, who had, in the beginning, promised twenty thousand crowns, bequeathed still more to it by his will. While the Founder of the Missions labored so energetically to comfort the poor, these same poor, preferring a wandering life to the honorable living which the holy man had procured for them, spread injurious reports against him, and returned evil for good, but the fruitless efforts of this crowd of beggars served but to heighten the lustre of his virtue.

XIX.

EXERCISES FOR ASPIRANTS TO HOLY ORDERS.

Mr. des Gesvres, Bishop of Beauvais, afflicted at the evils of the church, sought to remedy them. He often conferred with Vincent de Paul, and the wise counsels he received formed the basis of the reformation of his diocese, or rather of that part of France which followed his example. The deplorable state of the clergy of Beauvais afflicted their worthy Bishop. Vincent, to whom he had spoken concerning it, told him, one day, that it was almost impossible to convert an ecclesiastic who was not what he ought to be—that priests who are hardened in crime, are hardly ever converted, that to labor with fruit, for the reformation of the clergy, we must go to the very source of the evil, and that, since there is nothing to hope from old priests, we must train new ones for the future. The execution of this project had its difficulties, but Vincent added that it would succeed, provided that the Bishop were firm in not admitting to orders any but those who were truly called to it by God.

This proposition pleased the Bishop of Beauvais

and he considered the means of carrying it into effect—but what was he to do, since he had neither seminaries, nor anything approaching to them, for young ecclesiastics? The prelate concluded that to prepare those ready for Holy Orders, he could do nothing better than to have them come to his house, to keep them there some days, instructing them by regular conferences, on the things which they should know, and on the virtues which they should practice. It was but just that the holy priest should take part in the execution of a design whose general plan was his. The Bishop de Gesvres not only had him reduce to writing the order to be observed in the retreat, but also to prepare the subjects which he should judge suitable to be presented for meditation. He besought him, also, to come to Beauvais to preside at the exercises. The Saint, during this retreat, explained the decalogue, but with so much unction, that a great number of those who assisted at his conferences, wished to make a general confession to him. This was not the only blessing God gave to this journey of Vincent's, for having met upon his route some Protestants who wished to enter the lists with him, he made them so feel the weakness, and even the folly of their pretended reform, that three of them opened their eyes to the light and returned to the church.

Nearly two years after this first retreat to seminarians, the Bishop of Beauvais entertained

Mr. de Gondi, first Archbishop of Paris, on the great fruits which these exercises produced in his diocese. The Archbishop resolved to commence in Paris the same that Mr. de Gesvres had so happily accomplished in Beauvais. He ordained, by a mandate of the twenty-first of February, 1631, that those who were to receive Holy Orders in his diocese, should be obliged to make a ten days' retreat in preparation. The *College des Bons-Enfans* was designated as the place for these retreats. Holy Orders were conferred there in the Lent of the same year. The utility of these new exercises was very soon evident. People admired the change effected in the ecclesiastics of the parishes. They were more grave, more reserved, more pious, more attentive to perform the ceremonies well. The clergy of the diocese of Paris who made these exercises, were distinguished from those of other dioceses, where they enjoyed the same happiness. This it was that made some ladies propose to Vincent that he should receive all without exception, who wished to prepare for ordination, from whatever country they might come. A newly established house was unable to bear so heavy an expense, but Providence furnished means for a time. The lady of the President of Herse, and the Marchioness of Maignelay, ladies of exalted piety, helped Vincent to sustain a weight which had begun to overpower his house.

Anne of Austria came to the College des Bons-

Enfans, while the seminarians were assembled. She was present at one of the conferences given by Mr. de Perrochel, who was afterwards named to the bishopric of Bologna. She felt how important it was for the clergy that these means, so well calculated to the sanctification of young ecclesiastics, should be continued. Some of the ladies of her suite took the liberty to remark that a good work which her majesty considered of so much importance merited a royal endowment. The Queen gave them reason to hope, but as Kings, themselves, are not always in a situation to do that good which they wish to do, the endowment was not made. Thus the burden of the expense, which amounted yearly to what would support for two months, nearly one hundred ecclesiastics, fell on the congregation of the Mission.

The Saint knew well that the congregation would hardly be equal to it, and his friends entreated him to give it up, owing to the monetary difficulties of the times, but this great heart, which preferred the good of the Church to the temporal interest of his house, departed not from his first design, and when, in 1646, the Archbishop was told that those preparing for minor orders ought to make a retreat, as well as those for Holy Orders, Vincent received them with a tender and respectful affection. An ecclesiastic of much virtue said: "It is impossible to express Mr. Vincent's care

that the seminarians should be well served, during the exercises. The expense seemed nothing to him, although it much exceeded the resources of his house. During the troubles in Paris, some persons of dignity wished to persuade him not to tax his house with these retreats during such trying times; but he wished, notwithstanding the scarcity of money, and provisions, to which the city was reduced, to continue to incur the necessary expenses for the eleven days' retreat, not willing to sacrifice a spiritual to a temporal good. At the approach of every time for an ordination, what did he not say, touching the excellence of the priesthood, to induce his brethren to be of service to the seminarians, and to employ all their powers of soul and body to the advancement of ecclesiastics in virtue! All his words were as burning arrows, penetrating to the depths of the heart. Each one merited to be preserved in writing, and if it has not been it is an irreparable loss."

Vincent represented to his brethren that the ecclesiastical state is more noble and elevated than any that can be imagined on earth, that Jesus Christ Himself was devoted to the employment of forming good priests, and that He spent several years in training his twelve apostles. He added that they were more than ever obliged to redouble their efforts to give worthy ministers to the Church, because it stood in special need of them;

that there were vast cantons, where nearly all the priests lived in idleness and in the evils that follow in its train; that it was impossible that the people should live well when their spiritual heads were so unworthy; in fine, that the two-fold misfortunes that had fallen upon France, and the neighboring kingdoms, were a punishment of the corruption of the clergy. This last idea of Vincent was not confined to him, for before him, holy doctors had looked upon the disorders in the affairs of the Church as the consequences of irregularities among priests.

"The exigencies of the times," said the holy man, "demand a redoubling of prayers and tears. The Church is destroyed in many places, and it is owing to the sins of her priests. They are the cause of that deplorable decrease which she has suffered in Asia, in Africa, in a considerable part of Europe, especially in Sweden, Denmark, England, Scotland, Ireland, Holland and a great part of Germany. We know not that France and Poland are to be protected from the contagion. It is to be feared that God will transfer His church to strange nations. A prophet predicted that the wounds of the people of God would come from the north: '*Ab aquilone pandetur malum*,' says Jeremiah. It was, in truth, from thence came the Goths, Visigoths and Vandals, who brought so many disasters to our fathers." From these principles, the Saint drew two conclusions; first, that

those of his congregation, and particularly himself, ought to annihilate themselves before God at the sight of their miseries, since it needed but one unworthy member in their number to draw down that deluge of evils upon the earth which they witnessed, and that for him and his brethren there was no duty more pressing than that of a perfect renovation. Second, that far from considering the expense, or the necessary labors to train the seminarians to the functions of their state, as burdensome, they should look upon them as a singular favor: "Return thanks," said he, "that God has preferred us to so many others, much more worthy, without merit, or any proportionate or adequate virtue, and beg that we may acquit ourselves of the duty with care, for fear that God would deprive us of it, to punish our infidelities."

The means which he wished them to use to be successful in the retreats of the seminarists, were proportioned to the esteem which he had for the priesthood. He recommended, first, prayer, fervent communions, mortifications, and everything that could attract the protection of Heaven upon those who labored, and upon those for whom they labored. Then he wished that in every respect, and whichever way they turned, the seminarists should find in his house only such examples as were suited to instruct and edify them. Hence, he gave strict orders for gravity in chant, exactitude to ceremonies, silence and modesty, so that from the

moment of their entrance into the house, they should breathe the Spirit of God. They omitted nothing which they could reasonably do to please them—and wished to divine their desires and inclinations. Vincent bestowed upon them, and had his brethren bestow upon them, every kind of attention. The seminarists were received less as strangers than as children of the house.

Of the conferences or entertainments, which are the essential part of these peculiar exercises, two were given daily. One upon the necessary qualifications for a minister of Jesus Christ, who wished to save himself and to save his brethren,—the other upon the principal points of moral theology. In the conferences on the virtues suited to the holy ministry, mental prayer was treated on, vocation to the ecclesiastical state, the sacerdotal spirit, orders in general and in particular, the disposition necessary to receive them worthily, the knowledge needed to perform their functions properly, and, finally, the holy and laborious life which those ought to lead who are charged with cultivating the vine of the Father of the family. In the second class of discourses, those upon moral theology, censures were spoken of, irregularities, the sacraments of penance, the divine and human laws, sins, the theological virtues, the commandments of God, the sacraments and the Apostles' creed. As it was impossible to treat, in detail, so many matters, in so short a time, an epi-

tome was summed up, which recalled to mind what these ecclesiastics had studied more at length and touched upon points that had not impressed them. To impress them still more, after each discourse, the seminarists were distributed into bands of twelve or fifteen. Over each one of these little bands, a priest of the mission presided, who conferred with the young men on the most important things that had been said. Vincent wished much detail, and in the detail much simplicity on both sides. He was persuaded that if they followed this plan, the seminarists would bear away in their minds nearly all that had been said.

Although exercises so short, and so rapid, would not naturally have been more than moderately successful, nevertheless, God gave them a benediction, which was looked upon as the fruit of the prayers of His servant. To form an unbiased judgment, it will suffice to compare the state of dioceses before and after the introduction of the exercises. Before they were made, the prelates spoke of some ecclesiastics only in terms of the greatest bitterness. "In my diocese," a prelate said to him, "the clergy are without discipline, the people without fear, the priests without devotion, the pulpits without preachers, science without honor, vice without chastisement. Virtue is oppressed, the authority of the Church contemned, private interest is ordinarily the weights of the sanctuary, the most scandalous are often the most

powerful, flesh and blood have supplanted the Gospel. I feel assured that you will be solicitous yourself to hasten to the succor of so abandoned a diocese. The occasion is worthy of your charity."

Another prelate wrote to him: "Except the chief canon of my Church, I know no priest in my whole diocese who can discharge any ecclesiastical duty. You will judge from this, how great our need of laborers."

This is enough to give an insight into the deplorable condition of the greater portion of the clergy, when Vincent de Paul undertook their reform, and to execute his design, established the retreats for seminarians in his own house, and wherever his counsels were followed. The letters of thanks which the holy man received, from all parts into which he had sent his priests to conduct the same exercises, clearly attest the great good they produced—from Angoulême and Richelieu, he heard that the cities and countries blessed God for so great a benefit; that the people, touched by the modesty of the ecclesiastics, shed tears of joy and tenderness; that, charmed with the decorum and piety of the new priests, on beginning the divine offices, they thought that they beheld angels from Heaven. The Bishops of Poictiers, Rheims, Noyon, Chartres, of Laintes, &c., wrote to Vincent desiring to express their gratitude, and finished by beseeching him to leave

them these same laborers, who had begun to effect so much good in their dioceses.

The fame of a success as brilliant as it had been unforseen, soon spread throughout France. A holy emulation animated the prelates of the Church of God,—all had recourse to the Founder of the Congregation, to receive from him the same help that he had already bestowed upon their neighbors, but the harvest was too abundant,—so small a number could not gather it in so many different places. Several Bishops were obliged to await the hour which the Father of the family had marked, and which was alone in His power; others sought to know the method to which Vincent adhered in these retreats. They conformed to it and soon experienced how advantageous it was.

Italy was, in the sequel, convinced equally with France, of the good to be thus effected. Accordingly, as the children of Vincent de Paul were established there, they introduced, as far as the genius of the people would permit, the holy practices of their founder. They established them at Genoa, and at Rome, and the fruit which they there produced was not less consoling. Urban VIII. established the priests of the mission at Monte-litorio. The Hand of God was with them in that city as well as everywhere else. The Cardinal Vicar, after the death of Urban VIII., issued a mandate, enjoining that all those who aspired to Holy Orders should retire into the house to prepare

to receive them by the exercises of a retreat. Alexander VII. succeeded to the throne of St. Peter, and having heard an account of this matter, confirmed what the Cardinal Vicar had done, so that, assiduity at these holy exercises became a necessary condition for the reception of Holy Orders. So advantageous a report was afterwards made to this Pope that His Holiness testified in a consistory held soon after, that he was well pleased. Prelates and Cardinals attended the discourses. The Pope, more and more convinced that nothing was more proper either to keep away from the sanctuary those whom God had not destined for it, or to nourish ecclesiastical virtues in those truly called, was firm in not dispensing any one from them.

Spain delayed not to profit of these exercises, as Italy had profited of those commenced by Vincent in France. The Bishop of Placentia, who wished sincerely the good of his clergy, went to Montecitario at the first ordination; in order to unite practice with theory, he assisted at all the exercises. He took down a plan of the order of exercises, and sent it into his diocese with directions that it should be followed exactly until he himself, detained by the affairs of the King, his master, should be permitted to see them carried out.

It is the fate of the holiest enterprises to be the butt of jealousy. The great fruits produced by these exercises, and the meet praises awarded them in Rome, caused a feeling of rivalry in a religious community there that believed it would be to its

own honor to have the privilege of giving them. In general, none of the passions reason; but envy, perhaps, reasons less than any. It is said that this order neglected even the appearance of outward decorum, under which the majority have the skill to cloak themselves, to deprive the priests of the Mission of an employment which had not been sought by them. These religious presumed to say to the Pope that to give such an honorable commission to one house only was to despise the others. What is more surprising in this, is that those who spoke thus had asked the office for themselves, to the exclusion even of those who till then had been fulfilling it. They did not succeed in their unprincipled project. The Pope, persuaded that enterprises the most crossed, are such as come from God, published a brief, by which, of his own accord, he approved and confirmed all that he had at first ordained. Innocent XI. confirmed also, by circular letters, what Alexander VII. had promulgated under that head. Innocent XII. went further than his predecessors, for he forbade the power of hearing confessions to be given to those who had not yet received it, or the continuance of it to such as had already received it, if they had not made eight days' retreat in the house of the Missionaries. Thus it is that the works of God increase and strengthen, even amidst contradictions.

The success with which the children of the holy priest labored to form virtuous ecclesiastics in the city of Rome, determined several prelates to call

them to their dioceses. The Cardinal Barbarigo, Bishop of Bergamus, under the government of Venice, asked them to give retreats to his seminarists. This prelate took part in the labors of the Missionaries—he himself gave some of the pious entertainments of the ordination. His example was followed by several Cardinals of Rome. A large number of bishops, prelates, generals of orders, were also as much pleased as the seminarists with the beautiful discourses of Cardinal Albici and of the Cardinal of the Holy Cross. This idea of inviting learned persons of note to give these pious entertainments, was Vincent de Paul's. He knew that, although the word of God is of itself full of force, it seems, nevertheless, to have more power in the mouths of those whose great names render them superior to other men. From this principle it was that Bossuet, and many great bishops after him, have more than once given the entertainments to the aspirants to the priesthood at Saint Lazarus.

XX.

HIS FAITH.

Faith is the foundation of Christian virtues, the basis of salvation, the nourishment of the just while upon earth. Vincent feared even the shadow of anything that could weaken his faith: he knew that the more simple it is, the more agreeable it is to God. He based it not upon human reasonings, nor philosophical subtleties, but upon the authority of the Church. "As the more a person gazes upon the sun, the less can he see—in like manner," said the Saint, "the more one reasons upon the truths of religion the less faith will he have. In order to believe, it suffices that the Church speak; we know we cannot err in submitting to her. The Church is the Kingdom of God, and it appertains to His Providence to designate the course to be followed by the pastors who govern it, and not to permit them to take one which would end in error."

These dispositions gave the servant of God a just abhorrence of those inquiet, curious minds, which delight in refined reasonings on our mysteries, and desire to penetrate them. The exalted idea he had of our Faith, made him desirous of communicating it, as far as he possibly could, to such, particularly, as were the most destitute of its lights. Hence it

was, that he so often catechised and instructed the poor, who are generally neglected. And for the same reason, he sought to infuse the like desire into the hearts of those among his friends, whom he believed the most capable of exercising these charitable duties, and to establish a congregation, that is to say, a company of evangelical laborers, destined to bring forth and cultivate the seeds of faith in the most barren soil Hence it was, that the Saint took so much pleasure in publishing the good effected by other companies, that good which a jealous mind would have regarded as rivalry. "Father Eudes," he remarked on one occasion, "with some other priests, whom he has brought from Normandy, has given a mission in Paris, which has caused great excitement and produced much fruit. The concourse was so great that the court-yard of the Quinze-Vingts was too small to accommodate the auditory. We have no part in this good work, because our portion is to tend to the poor country people; we have only the consolation of seeing that our little employments have served to inspire a spirit of emulation in a number of good laborers, who work with more effect than we do." What faith, or rather what humility, did not the Saint evince by these words, or, indeed, how much of both these virtues! When faith is as lively as was that possessed by Vincent, it is always accompanied by profound humility.

If the holy man had the purity of faith, he had also its plenitude. He lived thereby, for the just

man lives by faith; it animated his words, his actions, his affections, and his thoughts. It was upon the level of faith, that he regulated his judgment, formed his projects, and executed his enterprises. What the greater part of mankind do, either by natural impulse, or human principles, he effected from a motive of faith and in conformity with its rules. A design which the views of a wise policy would authorize, pleased him only because it was authorized by the maxims of the Gospel, or could be referred to some supernatural end. He was convinced that the reason the affairs undertaken for God succeed so badly, or, at least, so imperfectly, is because too much reliance is placed upon the views of human prudence. "No, no," said he, one day, "eternal truths are alone capable of satisfying the heart, and conducting us securely. Believe me, that to become perfect we must lean much on some one of the Divine perfections, either upon the goodness of God, His providence or His immensity. It is well also to convince one's-self by strong reasons, but these must be employed subserviently to the truths of faith. Experience teaches us that those who preach conformably to the light of faith effect more in souls than those who crowd their discourses with human reasonings and philosophical arguments; because the light of faith is always accompanied with a certain heavenly unction, which is secretly shed on the hearts of the auditors; hence, judge if it is not quite as necessary to our own perfection, as to procuring the salvation of souls, that

we accustom ourselves to follow always, and in everything, the light of faith?" The man of God followed this holy light so constantly that it was for him as the lamp which guided the steps of the royal prophet. Thy word is as a torch to my feet and a light to my ways. *Lucerna pedibus meis, verbum tuum, et lumen semitis meis.* By means of this lamp, shining in the most obscure places, he saw insensible objects, which the eyes of the body could not perceive. "If I consider," said he, "a poor countryman or woman according to the exterior, and the degree of intelligence manifested, I can scarcely discern the shadow of a reasonable creature, so gross and material does he seem, but if I look upon him in the light of faith I will see that this poor person represents the Son of God, who chose to be poor, and had scarcely the appearance of a man during His Passion, passing for a fool with the Gentiles, and as a rock of scandal with the Jews; and with all that, styling himself the evangelist of the poor. *Evangelizare pauperibus misit me.* O my God! although the poor seem worthy of contempt when viewed with carnal, worldly eyes, yet how beautiful do they become when considered in Jesus Christ, and in the light in which He viewed them."

Such was this holy man's faith; to have a still more extended view of it we need only glance at his other virtues. By the excellence and abundance of fruit we may judge of the strength and soundness of the root whence it springs. We have seen

then, with what zeal Vincent labored in the conversion of heritics, renegades, and infidels; his faith therein manifested itself in all its brilliancy.

XXI.

THE HUMILITY OF VINCENT DE PAUL.

Few Saints carried humility as far as did this holy priest. "No ambitious person," said a virtuous ecclesiastic, "ever had a greater desire of esteem, elevation and glory, than this holy man had of contempt, abjection, and all that can be conceived best suited to humble and confound."

To judge how far this portrait resembled him, it suffices to remark that Vincent looked upon himself as one calculated to ruin the work of God; on the honors rendered him, as wounds with which God strikes His enemies; very far from justifying himself when accused, he always sided with his accusers; would manage to find himself guilty when very innocent, condemned his slightest defects with more rigor than many others do their greatest faults. The Son of God, who, although He was the splendor of His Father's glory and the figure of his substance, condescended to be looked upon as the reproach of men and the outcast of the people, formed and increased in him these sentiments so opposed to nature. What seems most wonderful is that, notwith-

standing the good he effected and the applause he received, he never lost sight of his humble sentiments. When he came to Paris he chose to be called *Vincent*, rather than *de Paul*, for fear lest he might be taken for a man of rank. At court, where birth is sometimes the best recommendation, he made known that he was the son of a poor peasant. To these traits which have already given a sufficient idea of his character, we need only add that Vincent preferred ordinary rank to the highest; for this reason he did all that he could to induce Mr. Almeras to choose another state of life, because he was of high rank. It was his rule to make known his weakest side, and between two thoughts always to choose the more common, and that which would render him less conspicuous. In fine, it would be difficult not to acknowledge with the Cardinal de la Rochefoucault, that to find true humility upon earth, it must be sought in Vincent de Paul. In fact, he never lost an occasion of humbling himself, but seized it with eagerness, or, rather, he sought occasions when they did not present themselves. The Bishop of Saint-Pons happened to mention the Castle of Mont-Gaillard, which gave name to his family: "I know it well," replied Vincent, "I took care of swine in my childhood and used to lead them through those quarters." One day as he was taking leave of an ecclesiastic at the door of Saint Lazarus, a poor woman, thinking, no doubt, to win his favor thereby, said to him: "My lord, give me an alms." "O my poor woman," said Vincent, "you

do not know me, for I am the son of a poor villager." Another having said, with the same intention, that she had been the servant of Madam, his mother, the Saint replied before all present: "My good woman, you mistake me for some one else; my mother never had a servant, for she did her own work, as she was the wife and I the son of a peasant." A person of quality wrote to him from Acqs, that he had the honor of being related to him and by this title claimed his protection. The reply Vincent wrote was perfectly beautiful, but not to wander from our subject, it will suffice to say here, that the Saint, after having protested to the young man that he would do as much for him as he would do for his own brother, neglected nothing to rid himself of the honor which had been accorded to him of being ranked among his relations, failing not to say that he was descended from a poor laborer, and that his first employment had been to tend his father's swine.

It was not only in relation to his low birth that Vincent thus attacked himself; he so lowered himself in mind and heart, as to render himself contemptible. "I am confused, Madam," said he, writing to the Baroness de Renty, who had asked his advice about the Hospital de Vere, "that you should address a poor priest like me, since you are neither ignorant of the shallowness of my mind, nor of my miseries." "For more than thirty years," said he, in a letter to the Superioress of the Visitation in Warsaw, "I have had the honor of

serving your houses in Paris, but, alas! my dear Mother, I am none the better for that, although I ought to have made great progress in virtue, knowing those incomparably holy souls. . . . . I beseech you very humbly to aid me to ask pardon of God for the bad use I have made of all His graces."

"I will offer up my prayers for you, since you direct me to do so," said he one day to Madam de Rochechonard, who was recommending herself to his prayers, "but I have need of the help of good souls more than any one else in the world, on account of the great miseries which overwhelm me, and which make me look upon the good opinion they have of me as a punishment of my hypocrisy, by which I pass for one different from what I am. Alas! I am useless for effecting any good and capable of every evil."

One of his brethren having written to him that the Superior he had sent to one of the houses was not of sufficiently cultivated manners for his place, Vincent, after having said much good of this Superior, whose solid virtues were to be more valued than the politeness of many others, failed not to take a part to himself. "And I myself, what do I? How is it that I have been endured to the present in the office I have, since I am the most low-bred, rude and foolish of men, amongst persons of rank, to whom I know not how to say six words without displaying my want of intelligence and judgment? And what is worse, I have

none of the virtues possessed by the person in question." If to the pure life and tried talent which this holy man possessed we must join the sentiments he had of himself in order to find grace before God, we might repeat with the Apostles: "*Lord, who then will be saved?*" Vincent spoke of the entire body of his congregation almost as he spoke of himself. All other communities seemed to him holy and respectable; according to him, his merited no consideration. One of his priests, who labored in Artois, took upon himself to print an abridged account of their Institute, and of the progress and labors of the congregation. Vincent complained to him of it: "An abridgement of our Institute has been printed in your quarter. I feel so sensible a pain on account of it that I cannot express it to you, because it is very much opposed to humility to make known what we are and what we do. . . . If there is anything good in us and in our way of life, it is from God and it is for Him to make it known, if He judges it expedient. But as to ourselves, since we are poor, ignorant and sinful, we ought to hide ourselves, as incapable of doing any good and as unworthy of being thought of. By God's grace I have judged the matter in this way and have persisted in my resolution not to consent to have anything printed that would make the company known and esteemed, although I have been much pressed, particularly regarding some accounts from Madagascar, Barbary, and the Hebrides. Still less, then, would I have permitted the publication

of what regards the essence, birth, spirit, progress, functions and end of our Institute; would to God it were yet undone! But as the matter cannot be remedied, I will let it rest here; only let me entreat you never to do anything regarding the company without informing me beforehand."

If charity had permitted, Vincent would have bestowed praises on whoever might defame his congregation, while he thus complained to one who had intended to honor it. At least, it is certain that a magistrate, deceived by false reports, having said in the Court Chamber that the priests of Saint Lazarus gave very few missions, and that, at a time when they were giving more than ever, the Saint, content with justifying himself by his works, would allow neither representation nor apology. It may be said he went still farther, for a powerful family, to avenge his having caused a bishopric to be refused to one of its members, invented a calumny against him, which, owing to its character, reached the Queen. This wise princess asked him smilingly if he knew of what he had been accused. At the risk of appearing guilty, the servant of God merely replied that he was a great sinner; but as her majesty maintained that he ought to justify himself, he replied: "They said many other things against our Lord, but He did not justify Himself. I am happy in being treated as was the Son of God; humiliations are the greatest favors the Lord can accord to men. Applauses ought to make us lament, since it is written: '*Væ cum benedixerint vobis homines.*'"

However great the care he took to inspire his brethren with the love of all the virtues, humility was, beyond question, that one on which he laid the most stress. "Nothing is more just," he said, "than the contempt one feels for himself; however little a man deliberately considers the corruption of his nature, the instability of his mind, the darkness of his understanding, the rebellion of his will, the impurity of his affections, his productions and works and weighs them in the balance of the Sanctuary, he will find that all is worthy of contempt; that in the holiest of his actions, as a minister of the Gospel, there is enough to confound him; since, in the greater number he conducted himself badly as regards the manner and the end also. If he does not wish to flatter himself, but would examine as he should the substance of things and all their attending circumstances, he will find himself not only more wicked than other men, but in a certain sense, worse than the demons, since he has at his command graces and means, of which those unhappy spirits would make a thousand, thousand times better use if they had them at their disposal."

To these motives, which he employed on a number of occasions, the holy man added yet others, drawn from the example of great men in early and modern times. St. Paul made known to the whole world that he had been so wretched as to have blasphemed God, and persecuted His Church. St. Augustine published the secret sins and errors of his life. Vincent added, that those whom God had

preserved from such shameful falls have not been less humble; that St. Francis de Sales spoke of the world as a man who contemns all vanities; that the Cardinal de Bérulle was accustomed to say that it is well to preserve lowly sentiments, that the lowest positions are the most secure, and that there was he knew not what malignity accompanying high, elevated positions, and that this is the reason why the Saints always avoided dignities, and why our Lord has said, speaking of Himself, that he came into the world to serve and not to be served. In fine, Vincent said, after Jesus Christ, that he who elevates himself shall be humbled; that the life of the Son of God was but one continual humiliation, and that He loved it to the end, so that now, after His death, He wishes to be represented in His Church under the form of a criminal fastened to a cross; by which He even now teaches us that the vice contrary to humility is the greatest evil that can be conceived; that it aggravates the guilt of other sins; that it renders actions bad which are not bad in themselves, and can even spoil the best and holiest. He found a striking proof of the truth of this last assertion in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican in the Gospel. "Yes," he continued, "however wicked we may be, if we have recourse to humility it will justify us. On the contrary, although we were like angels, if we were without humility, our virtues, not having any foundation, could not subsist. . . . Let each one of us engrave this truth on his heart, that whatever

virtues he thinks he has, if he has not humility he is only a proud Pharisee, and a miserable apology for a Missionary. O! my Savior, Jesus Christ, infuse into our minds those divine lights, which made you prefer insult to praises. Inflame our hearts with those holy affections which consumed yours, and which made you seek the glory of your Heavenly Father amidst your own confusion. Grant us grace to reject all that conduces not to your honor and our contempt; that we may renounce once and forever all the applause of deluding and deceitful men and all vain complacency on account of the good success we meet with in our actions." . . .

The holy priest looked upon peace as one of the first fruits of humility. He once said to his brethren: "During the sixty-seven years that God has suffered me to spend on earth, I have thought many times on the means to acquire and preserve union with God and our neighbor, but I have never found a better or more effectual means than humility; for when a man always humbles himself beneath all others, when he judges evil of no one, it is difficult for him to be at variance with any one. Humble souls, then, are always content; their joy shines on their countenances, and the Holy Spirit, who resides in them, so replenishes them with peace that nothing can trouble them. If they are calumniated, they bear it; if contradicted, they acquiesce; if forgotten, they think it is right; if overwhelmed with duties, they labor willingly; and however difficult the

thing commanded, they apply to it with a good will, confiding in the virtue of obedience. Their temptations serve but to strengthen them in humility and to render them victorious over the demon of pride, who never gives a truce in this life, and attacks even the greatest saints as long as they are upon earth. . . . Alas! to desire to be esteemed, what is it but to wish to be treated differently than was the Son of God!—for, for whom did He wish to pass in the minds of the people? For a seditious person, a fool and a sinner. He even willingly permitted that a Barrabas, a very wicked man, a thief, a murderer, should be preferred before Him. O my Savior, how your holy humility will confound sinners, like my miserable self, on the day of judgment! Let us be on our guard under this head; take care all you who go on missions. Sometimes, indeed, very often, the people are so touched at what they hear that they melt into tears: they even go farther sometimes, giving utterance to these words: '*Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the paps that gave you suck.*' We have heard the like; nature is pleased at hearing this, and vanity is engendered and nourished if these vain self-complacencies are not repressed, if the glory of God be not purely sought; yes, purely the glory of God and the salvation of souls; otherwise, one preaches himself, and not Jesus Christ. A person that preaches to make himself applauded, praised, esteemed, spoken of, of what is he guilty, if not of a sacrilege? For, is it not a sacrilege to make use of the Word of God

and of Divine things for acquiring honor and reputation? O my God! grant this company the grace that not one of its members should fall into such a misfortune. Believe me, my dear Sirs, we will never be fit to do the work of God unless we have a profound humility, and an entire contempt for ourselves."

Pride, according to Vincent, destroys great minds, as it wrought the destruction of the angels; and science, without humility, has at all times been very pernicious to the Church. He wished that all the ecclesiastics of his congregation had as much science as St. Thomas, provided they had the humility of that holy Doctor. He exhorted young students to love this holy virtue.

A proposition sustained with a great deal of talent afforded him less consolation than ill success afflicted him, if he perceived a shadow of self-sufficiency in the respondent. To root out this vice, so natural in such as excel others, he used to say that the last of the demons knew more than the best philosopher, and the most profound theologian; that God, in order to accomplish His work, has no need of the ministry of the learned; that He rejects them when they are proud, and that he prefers idiots, even women, as we see in these later times, in the reformation of a celebrated order in the Church. The Saint followed this method, to a certain degree, in his government; although a man was possessed of much natural or acquired talent, he confided no important employments to him when

he saw that he had not a sufficient groundwork of humility. He thought that without this principal virtue he could make some noise, but could effect no fruit in souls; because to humility is the grace of government or direction attached, and that without this grace a man hastens to his destruction. After a severe attack of illness, which had seized Vincent at Richelieu, the Duchess of Aiguillon sent him a small carriage, two of her horses and a coachman, to bring him back to Paris. As she knew his aversion for all that savored of show, she had had this carriage as simple as possible. The feeble state of his health at that time, and the orders of the Queen, who wanted him, made him drive in it to Paris. Arrived in the city, he sent the horses and carriage to the Duchess, with a thousand thanks. That pious lady sent them back to him, conjuring him to have some regard to his need of them, and to her desire to render him a service; but the ever humble man sent them back a a second time, protesting that if the swelling and weakness of his limbs, daily increasing, would not permit him to go out any more either on foot or horseback, he was determined to remain at St. Lazarus for the rest of his life, rather than be drawn in a carriage. This contest, arising from charity on one side, and humility on the other, lasted for some weeks. Finally, the Duchess of Aiguillon recurred to the Queen and the Archbishop of Paris, both of whom ordered our Saint to use a carriage for the future. He obeyed, but with extreme confusion.

He called his carriage *his shame* and his ignominy; one day as he was returning from a visit to the Fathers of the Oratory, four of them accompanied him to the door, and as he was taking leave of them, he said: "*Do you see, Fathers, that although I am the son of a poor peasant, I dare to make use of a carriage.*" We must add that this carriage and all its appendages became public property as soon as they belonged to the servant of God. For fear lest his horses should appear stylish, when not going out he had them put to the plough. This feeble help enabled him to render some important services to the Church and State during the ten years that he still survived.

END OF PART FIRST.

THE

SPIRIT OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL.

XXII.

INSTITUTION OF A COMPANY OF LADIES TO AID THE POOR.

The Lady of the President de Goussault, a wealthy woman, and possessed of an eminent spirit of charity, had remained a widow from the flower of her age; the world had offered her, by a second marriage, all that could flatter a young person of quality, but grace was stronger than nature. Jesus Christ, poor and suffering in the poor, was the only spouse the Lady desired. She represented to our Saint that the Hôtel-Dieu, in Paris, merited special attention; that nearly every year almost twenty-five thousand persons of every age, sex, country and religion, were inmates of it; that it would be a harvest of infinite extent, to the glory of God, if things were there conducted as they ought to be, but that she knew, from personal observation, that the poor there were wanting many helps, both spiritual and temporal.

Vincent knew that there was not the good order

at the Hôtel-Dieu which was afterwards established, but he also knew that there are some evils which must be endured, and of this number are those which cannot be stopped without danger of causing greater ones. Therefore he replied to the lady that he desired not to reap the harvest of another; that the Hôtel-Dieu was governed spiritually and temporally by directors and administrators whom he esteemed to be very wise, that he had neither power nor authority to hinder abuses found there as well as everywhere else; that they must hope for the necessary remedies to those evils from the officers—those charged with the government of that great house would apply the necessary remedies. This discourse was wise, and it is easy to recognize in these words a very circumspect spirit; however, as nothing was thereby effected, the zeal of the Lady President was not satisfied.

What the love of the world effects in the heart of a woman, who is its votary, the love of God still more easily effects in the heart of a virtuous woman who breathes but for His glory. Madame Gonssault persisted in her wishes to have her project executed, and by Vincent. The only difficulty was to induce him to undertake it, for though he had little wish to do it, she knew too well his prudence and address to doubt of his success. Under this conviction, she spoke to the Archbishop of Paris, and in so urgent a manner that that prelate made known to the holy priest that it had given him pleasure to listen to the proposals that had been

made to establish a company of ladies to take special care of the sick of the Hotel-D'eu.

The Saint no longer doubted the will of God, since it had been manifested by the Archbishop, His organ. Therefore, without hesitation, he desired some ladies of quality and piety to assemble on a particular day and hour at the house of the Lady of the President. The Ladies de Bailleul, du Mecy, de Sainctol and de Polaillon attended; the man of God opened the meeting by so energetic a discourse upon the importance of the enterprise proposed, that every one present was resolved to embrace it. Vincent notified them of another assembly for the following week. He charged all who had attended the first, to invite to the second such of their friends as they judged suited to the good work they were undertaking, but, according to his custom, he urged them still more earnestly to recommend the affair to God. He wrote, also, to Madam Le Gras, telling her that her presence was required.

The second assembly was very large. Ladies as much distinguished by their virtue as by their rank were in attendance. The best known were Madam d'Aligre, Lady of the Chancellor of France, Madam Renaut de Traversai and Madam Fouquet. Three officers were elected on this occasion, a superior, an assistant and a treasurer. Madam Gonssault had the honor of being the first superior of the new company, and Vincent was fixed upon as its perpetual director. In a few years it became so flour-

ishing that it numbered more than two hundred ladies, among whom were seen, with edification, ladies of Presidents of Parliament, Countesses, Marchionesses, Duchesses and even Princesses, who humbly bent before the poor heads born to wear a diadem. The more respectable the ladies who testified their good will, the more did Vincent understand how essential it was to direct their zeal. For this he prescribed certain rules. As he possessed admirable discernment, and viewed matters in full detail, he remarked that there was question of effecting good without seeming to reproach those in charge of having omitted it; to do it before all who wished to witness it; in fine, to do it for the sick, for whom there was more to deplore spiritually than corporally.

On this principle the man of God, ordered that the ladies of the assembly, on entering the Hôtel-Dieu, should present themselves to the religious in care of the sick; that they should entreat them to be allowed to participate in their merits, having the consolation of serving with them; that in case they found some one who looked coldly on them, they should be on their guard against contradicting, or of wishing to gain the ascendency over her, and that, in fine, they should honor all those daughters as their own mothers, mistresses of the house and spouses of Jesus Christ. As regards the sick, they should speak to them with much sweetness, and never appear before them except in simple and modest apparel, lest the contrast should make them

feel more keenly their own misery, and that to render them more attentive to exhortations, they should bestow on them such little favors as the house did not furnish; that, in fine, not to offend the eyes of such as take pleasure in censuring all that they have not the courage to imitate, they should avoid not only making a show of learning, while instructing the sick, but also appearing to speak from themselves. Hence the holy priest wished them always to have a little book in their hands, which was printed expressly for the purpose, and containing the most essential Christian truths.

This project was executed and fully succeeded. The ladies, by their insinuating and respectful manners, gained the good will of the religious of the house. Every liberty was given them of visiting the wards and beds, to console the poor, to speak to them of God, to induce them to make a good use of their infirmities, and to prepare them for a Christian death. Abuses, which were the effect of a badly regulated zeal, were banished. It had been a custom at the Hôtel-Dieu, that all should confess as soon as admitted,—these confessions, made hastily by persons who were neither prepared nor instructed, could not be well made. Men brought up in heresy, were found to have confessed from the fear of not being received otherwise, or of not being well treated. After this first confession, no one spoke to the sick about making general confessions, but left them tranquil until the approach of death, or, in other words, until they were more incapable of confessing well than they were the first time.

The reform of this abuse was the first effect of the zeal of the new assembly. The ladies, who visited the sick, instructed them, taught them how to examine their consciences, how to excite in their hearts those sentiments of humility which are always acceptable to God. All this was effected with the simplicity of the children of God, as Vincent had very particularly recommended. These virtuous ladies seemed rather to recount what the mercies of the Lord had done to themselves, than to prescribe to others what they were to do. "Is it not a long time since you have confessed?" would they say to a sick woman. "Would you not like to make a general confession, if told how to do so? I have been told that it is important to salvation to make a good one before death, either to repair the faults of ordinary confessions, or to conceive a more lively sorrow for my sins, by representing on one side the most heinous of those that I have had the misfortune to commit during my whole life, and on the other, the infinite mercy of God, who, far from condemning me to the fire of hell when I had deserved it, has waited for my repentance to pardon me, and to give me Paradise if I am but converted to Him with all my heart. Now, you may have the same reasons that I have to make this general confession, and to give yourself to God to live holily all the rest of your days. And if you wish to know what to do to recall your sins, and afterwards to confess them as you ought, I have been told to examine myself as I am going to tell you, and I have also

been taught to make acts of faith, hope and love of God, and sincere sorrow for my sins, in this way."

Such was the method followed by the ladies of the assembly, according to the counsels of their wise director, in their instruction of the sick. It succeeded, and the most defaming critics found in it nothing to censure. When the sick were sufficiently instructed, the same ladies provided them with good confessors to finish what had been commenced. The number of the sick being increased, the ladies were overwhelmed with the multitude needing instruction, and as they could not, with propriety, render the same services to the men as to the women, they arranged with the superiors of the house, that six priests should be admitted, who should have no other employment than to instruct the men, and hear the confessions of men and women.

This arrangement, which secured essential aids to the sick and dying, did not prevent the ladies of the assembly from continuing to render those spiritual services which were in their power; they even thought that they had not done enough to correspond with the designs of God. It is easy to suppose that Mademoiselle Le Gras was not less ardent. The servant of God was obliged, more than once, to moderate her zeal. With a view to the preservation of the health of ladies so necessary to the poor, the Saint made a rule which relieved them much without being of detriment to the sick. Heretofore the same persons who had served them, had the

care of instructing them, and preparing them for death; but Vincent divided these employments, so that the ladies were arranged into two classes. One was to wait on the poor, the other to instruct them. Every three months fourteen were named for this two-fold duty. Two out of this number went each day of the week to the Hôtel-Dieu; when relieved from duty, they made a simple and faithful report to the assembly, of the success of their labors, and of the means which they had taken to succeed, so that their experience might be a rule and tend to encourage those who were to succeed.

So far, we have only spoken of the spiritual helps which these virtuous ladies bestowed on the sick; it is only just to say a few words on the corporal services which they rendered during the life of our Saint, and which they continued to render for more than sixty years after his death. From the commencement, these services were regulated by the report of Madam Goussault on the manner in which the poor passed the morning and afternoon. The sick received only coarse food, little suited to the state of weakness and general distaste for nourishment, to which nearly all the sick were reduced. A charity less tender than that of this illustrious widow would not have remarked this. One who does not suffer feels little for the sufferings of others, but a woman, whom grace had taught to look upon the poor as her own children, was very far from having sentiments so unfeeling; she wished to see them treated in their infirmities as she had been

treated in hers. Vincent seconded her good intentions, and decided that a house should be rented near the Hôtel-Dieu, and that the Sisters of Charity should be established there to prepare breakfast and collation for a thousand sick people. That in the morning, milk soup should be given to such as could take it, that after dinner they should be served with white bread, biscuits, preserves, cherries and grapes, according to the season and their degree of convalescence. That during the winter the ladies should carry them citrons, dried fruit, and apples roasted in sugar, that, in fine, those ladies whose turn it should be to go to the Hôtel-Dieu should consider it an honor to present these little sweets to those who had need of them.

The sight of ladies of the highest rank going in turn to discharge this duty of charity, with a sweetness and grace that domestics could not evince, delighted and touched the people and the nobility. The poor, who were most interested, were extremely affected, and their gratitude for the services bestowed upon them in their corporal needs disposed them to listen with pleasure to what was said for the sactification of their souls. It is not given to man to conceive what increase of glory God drew from an enterprise so wisely concerted. We may, however, form an adequate idea of it if it is allowed us to count the conversions of manners by the number of conversions in religion, for in the first year of the good work God blessed their efforts to such an extent that there were more than seven hundred

and sixty converts—as many Turks, as Calvinists and Lutherans, of whom several had been wounded and taken on sea, and who had abjured their false religion to embrace the Catholic faith. It was even a very common persuasion in Paris that there was a very special blessing attached to the labors of the ladies of the new company.

Though the expense incurred by those good ladies was great enough, it was but a prelude to the efforts they made some years later in favor of an immense multitude of poor in the kingdom and neighboring realms. In effect, these same ladies, under the direction, and almost always by the influence of the Saint, laid the first foundation of the General Hospital in Paris, opened an asylum for foundlings, and a retreat for virtuous girls in establishing the house of Providence. Their charity has been felt even amid the fires of Asia, Africa and America, where, by abundant alms, they have contributed to the support of ministers of the Gospel, to confirm the newly converted, to ensure the redemption of captives, the erection of several churches, and the apostolic care of the Bishops of Heliopolis, Berytus, and Metellopolis in China and Tartary.

XXIII.

INSTITUTION OF A SOCIETY OF LORDS FOR THE SAME OBJECT.

Charles IV., Duke of Larraine, more eager for sieges and battles than attentive to the tranquility of his people, put to flight a large number of persons of rank of both sexes, who judged from the extreme disgrace to which their friends and neighbors were reduced, what was ready to break over their own heads. To prevent this, they had concluded to carry away what they could from the wreck of their property, and repair to Paris. After spending all the money they had accumulated from the sale of their effects, the majority of these strangers found themselves reduced to a necessity, the more deplorable as they would not make it known. Shame, at finding themselves in a situation so different from that in which they had until then lived, shut their mouths, and they were resolved to suffer everything rather than make known their sufferings. A person of honor and merit being informed of this, apprised the holy priest. Vincent having for several years been taxing his house and best friends in Paris, was naturally somewhat embarrassed in such an exigency; however, he promised to seek means of

subsistence for them, and said to him who had made known their miseries: "Yes, sir, it is just to assist those poor noblemen to honor our Lord, who was at the same time very noble and very poor."

In an affair of so pressing a nature all delay was death; Vincent formed then three resolutions—the first was, not to retrench from the alms that were continually sent into Lorraine, and needed there by thousands of poor,—the second, was not to throw this new burden on the ladies of his assembly, who had need already of all their virtue to continue what they had so generously commenced,—the third was, to form an association of Lords who would consider it an honor to render to persons of the same rank as themselves all the services which they would have wished to have received from them under like circumstances. The Saint assembled seven or eight, and spoke to them in so effective a manner that Lords less well-disposed than they were would have been impressed. It was unanimously resolved that they should unite to extricate these impoverished noblemen from their embarrassed circumstances; that they should obtain an idea of the situation of every family, and that the help extended to them should be proportioned to the number and quality of those who had need of it. The Baron de Renty—whom God had given to that age to prove that a man of rank may, without leaving the world, unite to the duties of his calling the mortification of the cloister, the repose of contemplation, the zeal and activity of the apostolate,—this holy man was ap-

pointed to the investigation. Upon his report those who composed the new association clubbed together and furnished all that was necessary for one month. At the end of that time they re-assembled at St. Lazarus, where they held their meetings, and made the same arrangement for the following month. Vincent knew so well how to maintain their fervor from month to month that it continued for nearly twenty years.

This illustrious association should undoubtedly be placed among those great works of which the servant of God was the promoter. He found in it astonishing resources in an infinity of exigencies. He made it subserve sometimes, to put a stop to pernicious abuses; sometimes to bestow a very considerable number of blessings. Their aid to the nobility of Lorraine lasted through nearly eight years. All their favors were conferred with that delicacy that softens the pangs which the name of alms inflicts. The members of the association, not content with conferring monthly means of subsistence on these poor gentle folks, paid them friendly visits from time to time, consoled them, and rendered them every imaginable service. When the troubles of Lorraine had subsided, the greater number returned to their homes. The man of God took care not only to furnish them with a sufficiency for this journey, but with means to support them for some time after their arrival in their own country. Those whom total loss of property or domestic affairs detained still longer in Paris, he ceased not to

solace. Much courage was needed to continue these works of charity at a time, too, when he was obliged to assist others who were not second to them in birth nor in necessities.

England, designed it would seem, to be the theatre of the most surprising revolutions, was in arms against its King. Cromwell, under the pretext of re-establishing the purity of the Gospel, accustomed the people and the parliament little by little to find only a tyrant in the person of their lawful prince, and, by degrees, gave a foresight to Charles First, of the shameful scaffold upon which his own subjects would some years later deprive him of his head. During these fearful agitations Catholics had everything to fear. This determined a number of lords and gentlemen in England and Scotland to retire into France, the usual asylum from religious persecution. In the assembly of the Lords at St. Lazarus it was resolved that they should do for the nobility of England the same as had been done for that of Lorraine. Mr. de Renty took upon himself to distribute the alms. He set out on foot every month to those at a moderate distance, and even to the most distant quarters. Death having snatched him away in the flower of his youth—at the age of thirty-seven—the same year in which the King of England was beheaded, 1649,—the continuation of this assistance was, in truth, more difficult, but it was not diminished. Vincent continued it all the rest of his life, for, though Cromwell died before our Saint, (on the thirteenth

of September, 1658,) the charm that had fascinated the nation was not so soon dispelled; fifteen months elapsed before it felt the eternal infamy that shrouded it for allowing the most unworthy usurper that had ever lived to die tranquilly in his bed. Hence, it was only a little while before the death of the servant of God that the English fugitives could return to their country to enjoy there that little liberty extended to Catholics in a kingdom where it was permitted to be anything you wished provided you were not what you ought to be.

If the Saint had effected no greater good than he wrought by his counsels, exhortations, and the continual impulse he imparted, during a series of years, to the furtherance of good works, it would have sufficed to render his memory precious to all those who know the value and merit of charity; for, in truth, we know what it costs to ask without ceasing, even when not for ourselves, but the Founder of the Mission stopped not at words. "Mr. Vincent was always the first to give," said one of the Lords of the association,—"he opened his heart and his purse—consequently, when anything was wanting, he furnished it himself, and deprived himself of necessaries to finish the good commenced." Here are two instances which this same Lord and Abelly have transmitted to us.

One day, when twenty pistoles were wanting to complete the sum distributed every month, Vincent called the procurator of his house, and asked him,

in a low voice, what money he had: "I have absolutely only enough to provide to-morrow for the community, which, as you know, is very numerous." "But how much have you?" asked Vincent. "Fifty crowns, and in the whole house you will not find one cent more." "In the name of God," continued the Saint, "go and get it." Preferring to borrow to support his brethren, than to forsake one of those foreigners, whose principal resource he was, he left his house without money to retrench nothing from what had been promised, but Providence did not abandon a man who confided so perfectly in it. One of the Lords, having surmised the question of the holy man, from the reply of the procurator, admired his generous charity, and, sensibly touched, sent an alms, on the morrow, of one thousand francs to the house of St. Lazarus. The procurator was indemnified, but the poor gained more than he.

XXIV.

HIS MAXIMS.

Although these reflections are in detached sentences, faithful souls will not read them the less willingly, since they comprehend so many rules of action. I must premise that the Saint gave the thought of death as an excellent practice to support us in virtue; he did not wish it to be so dwelt upon as to diminish Christian confidence. "It is good to think of our last hour," he said to a lady, who had a lively fear of death, "the Son of God recommends it; but the thought of death must have its rule and bounds. It is neither necessary nor expedient that you should have it always present to your mind,—it is sufficient for you to think upon it twice or thrice a day without dwelling upon it for too long a time. It is not even necessary for you to entertain yourself on it, if it continues to give you uneasiness."

"The human mind," said he, speaking on error, "is prompt and restless; minds which are the most active and brilliant, are not always the best if they are not discreet; those walk most securely who turn not away from the way in which the majority of the wise travel."

The Saint was an enemy to precipitation. The words of Tite-Live, "celerity in deliberation causes the falsest steps," suited naturally to his taste, but when once he had decided, he was as prompt in executing as he had been slow and circumspect in examining. Then, whether the event were favorable or not, he remained in peace, well assured that the wise man ought not to judge of matters by their measure of success, but by the intention, fitness and proportion of the means, and that a well concerted affair may succeed badly, while another, rashly hazarded, may succeed well.

The doctrine of the Gospel was the only rule of his life. "Whoever says doctrine of Jesus Christ," said he, "says an immovable rock. The Eternal truths are infallibly followed by effects, so that sooner would the heavens be overturned than that the doctrine of Jesus Christ should fail."

Under the head of discretion, he said that the demons enjoy good works, made known and published unnecessarily, since such are as so many exploded mines.

When counseling the holy exercise of the presence of God to his penitents, the servant of God said that they should never do in private what they should be unwilling to do in public, since the presence of God should impress us more strongly than that of all mankind.

We must, according to Vincent, choose a favorable time for fraternal correction. It was proposed one day, to mortify a religious of the Visitation,

who merited a mortification, but her mind was not sufficiently tranquil to profit by it,—he replied in these simple but most judicious words: "We do not give medicine without great necessity to one in fever."

The man of God held it for a maxim, that those who are not prepared, by recollection, to resist the houses of the great, would not long be proof against the dangers with which they are filled.

I know not whether the children of the world will pardon him for the following maxim,—that he would wish rather to be delivered up to the insults and rage of hell, than to live without crosses and humiliations. He would have looked upon a man as exposed to a danger next door to destruction, with whom everything succeeded, and who had no contradictions to prove him.

"What the sword is to soldiers, prayer is to such as are consecrated to the service of the altars."

"A building of which God is not the architect cannot last long."

"A community which exactly observes silence is extremely faithful to the rest of its constitutions; on the contrary, the one in which they speak as much as they please, observes neither rule nor order."

The grand maxim of the Saint concerning vocation, was that it belonged alone to God to choose his ministers, and that the vocations which artifice gives rise to, and which a kind of bad faith nourishes dishonor the flock in increasing it. To avoid the

first of these two defects, he made it an inviolable rule with himself, never to say a word to engage any one to enter his congregation, and forbade his brethren to entice any one into it. Every step of this nature seemed a crime to him and he treated it as an attempt against the designs of God. He would not even allow himself to bias the inclinations of those who seemed drawn to his congregation. On such occasions, he represented to them that an engagement of this nature required to be well considered, that it must be weighed maturely and in the presence of God, that it is, perhaps, a very small favor to be called to be a missionary, but it is a point of moment to the entire body not to have any members but such as are truly called. A man of such rigorous principles with regard to those that have not yet taken a decided step, was very far from proposing his congregation to those who felt called to another state. The Carthusians, and several other orders which required their postulants to pass some days in retreat at St. Lazarus, to consult God, had reason to depend upon his uprightness. To entice any one from the order to which he was called, appeared to him a theft and a sacrilege. "It would be to take that from God which He does not give us," said he to his brethren, "to go against His holy will, and to draw down His indignation. It is for the Father of the family to choose laborers. A missionary presented by His paternal hand will do much more good than many others whose vocations are less pure. It is for us, then, on one side, to pray

the Lord that He send into His harvest men capable to reap it, and on the other, to force ourselves to live so well that by our example we may attract such as God calls to labor with us." To avoid the second defect, which is that called in law deceit and bad faith, the Saint did not imitate those who present only flowers to youth, during their probation, not revealing the thorns until the final step in their course has been taken.

The plan of his noviciate had nothing which could overstrain nature, yet was all that was necessary to make the novices feel the weight of the obligations which are its term. Neither cilice, haircloths, iron cinctures, disciplines, nor any extraordinary fasts, are prescribed, but in lieu thereof is exacted that which usually costs much more dearly —great detachment from the world, a very interior life, a great deal of humility, mortification, watchfulness over self, fidelity to every duty, and, if possible, an inexhaustible fund of that holy unction which might one day support and console men, engaged by their state to all that is most painful and repelling in the ministry. He wished that the missionaries should be ready to give their life for the Son of God, as He has given His for all mankind. "Every day we see merchants, who, for a moderate gain, will traverse seas and expose themselves to an infinity of dangers. Should we be less courageous than they are? Are the precious stones which they seek, more valuable than the souls which are the objects of our sweat, our labors and our calling?"

To a man who would have willingly been raised to a prelacy, the Saint gave a beautiful lesson upon religious who seek ecclesiastical dignities. A celebrated religious, who had preached with success in the first pulpits of the Kingdom, represented to him his long labors, the austerity of his rule, the diminution of his strength and his fear of not being able to continue for a long time the services which, till then, he had sought to render the Church. He added that he had found a means of tempering the rigors of his situation, so that he might still labor usefully,—that the episcopal dignity would dispense him from the fasts and other austerities of his order, and that he would thus be better able, physically, to preach with vigor and fruit, and that he counted upon his friendship to obtain his nomination from the King. The servant of God sought to make this religious feel that the beautiful fancy that had enchanted him was but a delusion of the devil. To this end, after having testified his esteem for his order, and for himself in particular, the Saint told him, in substance, that God, having made known by the success with which He had honored his endeavors, that He wished him in the state which he had embraced, had not yet given reason to suppose that He willed him to leave it; that if God had destined him to the episcopacy, He would find means to raise him to it, without any efforts of his.—"But," added Vincent, "for you to introduce yourself into it, would it not be something censurable, and would you have reason to hope for the bene-

dictions of Heaven, in a change which should neither be desired or sought by a truly humble soul, like yours? Moreover, in depriving your order of a man who sustains it by his example, reflects credit on it by his erudition, and is one of its principal pillars, you would do a real injury, and be an occasion that others should either leave their retirement, or at least be disgusted with the exercises of penance; like you, they would find pretexts to mitigate salutary rigors, for nature wearies of austerities, and if consulted she will say that they are too much, that they must be so moderated as to allow her to live a long time, and to serve God more, whereas our Lord has said, 'He who loveth his life shall lose it, and he who hateth his life shall save it.'

"You, Reverend Father, know better than I all that can be said on this, and that I would not have told you my thoughts if you had not desired me. But, perhaps you do not pay heed to the crown which awaits you. O my God! how beautiful it is! You have done so much already to acquire it, and perhaps but little more remains to be done. You must persevere in the path in which you are, and which conducts to life. You have already surmounted the principal difficulties. You ought, then, to take courage and to hope that God will give you grace to conquer the lesser ones." Thus did Vincent cut away every germ of ambition, and even that which, clothed under the appearance of good, sometimes seduces men full of light and virtue.

The holy man sometimes expressed the extreme

reserve with which he wished censures to be employed. Louis Abelly, who wrote the life of the servant of God, being an official in Bayonne, consulted Vincent, for Bishop Fouquet, upon the line of conduct to be observed towards a number of religious whose lives were far from edifying, and who to their other faults joined one more heinous than rare,—that of proprietorship. It was thought that they could be subdued better by retrenching all their powers, forbidding their collecting, and adding to these chastisements, excommunication in case of obstinacy. However, before resorting to these measures, the Bishop and his official thought that it would not be doing badly to know what Vincent de Paul thought. The Saint began his reply by expressing his surprise that they should wish to consult him. He said that he would speak as did the ass of Balaam, that is, in obedience to those who commanded him, on condition, always, that as no account is made of what fools say, simply because they are such, so neither Mr. Bayonne, nor his official, ought to govern their conduct by his sentiments, only so far as they were conformed to theirs, which he should always esteem much more than his own. "My advice is," he continued, "that in general we should treat disorderly religious as Jesus Christ treated sinners in His time. A bishop, a priest, obliged, as such, to be more perfect than a religious, considered purely as a religious, ought, for a time, to proceed but by the way of good example, remembering that the Son of God followed

no other course for thirty years. After that he should speak with charity and sweetness, then with strength and firmness, without, however, using interdicts, suspension, or excommunication,—terrible censures, which the Savior of the world never employed. I can readily believe that what I say will surprise you a little. But what do you wish?—this sentiment is in accordance with those which I have imbibed from the truths our Lord has taught us by word and example. I have always remarked that what is done by this principle succeeds perfectly. It was by following it that the Blessed Bishop of Geneva, and the late Mr. de Comminges, after his example, were sanctified, and have been the cause of the sanctification of so many millions of souls. You will doubtless tell me that they will condemn a prelate that acts in this manner. This is true for a time, and it is even necessary, so that in our persons, we may honor the life of the Son of God in all its stages, even as we honor it in our ministry. But it is also true, that after having suffered some time, and as much as it pleases our Lord that we should, He will make us do more good in three years than otherwise we would have done in thirty. Indeed, Sir, I do not think we can succeed in any other way. Fine regulations can be made, censures employed, all faculties retrenched, but will these religious be thereby corrected? Not likely. These means neither extend nor preserve in hearts the empire of Jesus Christ. God has, before this, armed heaven and earth against man—was it in this

He thereby converted? Alas! it was necessary for Him to be abased and humbled before man to induce them to accept His yoke? That which God has not effected, with all His power, can a prelate effect by his? Hence I believe that Mr. de Bayonne has reason not to fulminate a sentence of excommunication against these religious proprietors, nor even to prevent, so soon, from preaching advent and lent in the country parishes, those whom he has once examined and approved,—if any one is guilty of an abuse in his ministry, you, in your wise government, will know well how to remedy it." It would be to know but little of the spirit of our Saint to conclude from his letter that he pushed indulgence beyond just limits. He knew how to unite meekness with a wise severity. It was by this mingling of virtues that, while he gave these counsels, he was co-operating in the reformation of several orders, whose bad state had appeared desperate.

Vincent combated to fire and blood, lying and jealousy,—those cruel passions which pardon nothing to merit, either at home or abroad. He said that the arrows of envy and detraction do not pierce the hearts of those against whom they are aimed, until after they have pierced, through and through, the heart of Jesus Christ.

Those who approach Jesus Christ with the fervor of Zacheus, ought not to blame those who remain away with the humility of the publican. However, the long experience that the holy priest had had of the admirable effects of the Holy Eucharist, inclined

him to press every one to endeavor to receive worthily and frequently. "You have done wrong," wrote he to one of his penitents, "to withdraw, to-day, from the Holy Communion, for the interior trouble you have felt. Do you not see that it is a temptation, and that by it you give power to the enemy of this adorable sacrament? Do you expect to become more capable and better disposed to unite yourself to our Lord by removing from Him? O! indeed, if you have this thought, you are much deceived. It is not wonderful for one to keep away from the table of the Lord, because nature finds it to its own account, since it costs something to acquire and preserve the necessary dispositions. Self-vigilance is a burden that nature willingly casts off. A lady of merit had been for a long time, by the advice of her director, in the habit of communicating twice a week. Curiosity, and I know not what whimsical desire of perfection, induced her to change her confessor. Frequent communion was the first sin of which the new confessor wished to correct her; but a man who knows his trade, and who loves only to startle his penitents, proceeds but by degrees. Thus at first the lady communicated but once a week, afterwards, once a fortnight, then at the end of the month. The only fruit she drew from the privation was that, little by little, the spirit of vanity, impatience, anger and other passions gained empire over her. Her imperfections multiplied, and she at last found herself in a very deplorable state. She sought for the cause, and found it in the coun-

sels of her new director,—pernicious counsels, since they produced such bad effects. This lady, placed under more salutary counsels, resumed her first practices, better convinced than ever, that to communicate often she must live well, but that to live well, it is necessary to communicate often. She found, by frequenting the sacraments, repose of conscience and the remedy of all her faults.

XXV.

HIS MISSIONS.

The Missions are public exercises, in which by simple, but solid and pathetic instructions, the people are induced to weep for their sins, to repair them by serious penitence, and to live, henceforth, in sanctity. To be efficacious, these exercises require order and precaution; since the missionaries must have intercourse with pastors, whose places they, in a manner, hold for a time with the people, whom they should instruct without dispiriting, and for the laborers themselves, who, to sanctify others, require zeal, charity and, indeed, every virtue. Vincent so planned everything as to secure these different but necessary ends.

Beyond a command of the bishop, from which no one can dispense himself, he undertook nothing without the consent of the pastors. In case of a

refusal, he retired humbly, and went to offer his services to others, remembering that the apostles were not received with open arms in every place into which they purposed to carry the light of the Gospel. When a pastor consented to a mission in his parish, one of the missionaries, by way of an opening, announced in a discourse, the approaching merciful visit of God to His people, the multitude of graces that God is ever ready to grant to those who render themselves worthy by a return to Him, the misfortune of those who refuse to hear His voice, and the necessity of commencing at that very moment to break any ties which bound them to sin. Some days after the missionaries repaired to the place indicated and devoted themselves entirely to the prosecution of the work. Every day they gave three kinds of public exercises—a sermon early in the morning, so that poor people might not lose any time usually allotted to work, a little catechetical exercise at one o'clock in the afternoon, and after sunset extended exercises of the same kind.

The sermons were to be solid but natural. Metaphysical ideas, whose discussion only honors the talents of the speaker, were not treated,—the importance of salvation, enormity of sin, obduracy of heart, final impenitence, the four last things, false shame, contrition, relapse, lies, envy, pardon of injuries, restitution, intemperance and some other like disorders which more easily insinuate themselves in the country,—the good use of poverty and afflic-

tions, sanctification of Sundays and Fasts, necessity and manner of prayer, frequenting the sacraments, assisting at the sacrifice of the Mass, imitation of our Lord, devotion to the Holy Virgin, the happiness of perseverance, in a word, everything that could incite a poor peasant to go to God, everything that he should avoid to be happier after death than he had been in life, were the usual subjects of the sermons.

As to the extended catechetical instruction, it has for its object, the explanation of the principal articles of faith, and of the most practical truths of religion. Hence they treated of the mysteries of the Holy Trinity, the incarnation of the Son of God, of the price at which He has chosen to redeem us. They spoke afterwards of the commandments of God and of the Church, of the sacraments, the symbol, the Lord's prayer and the angelical salutation. The exposition of these different matters was regulated by the length of the mission and the character of the auditors. Each one of these fathers that had labored for their salvation, acted so as to be able to say, on leaving them, what St. Paul said to the Melesians: "*I take you to witness that I am innocent of your destruction; I have done all in my power to hinder it.*"

The extended catechetical instruction, given in the pulpit, being intended for the instruction of persons of maturity, another was added for children. They were invited on the first day, by a familiar exhortation, to attend the exercises regularly, and

taught how to profit by them. They were addressed in a manner proportioned to their narrow capacity, —drawing from the principles of faith consequences, calculated to form or to correct their manners. They were animated by thoughts of the recompense which should be the reward of their steadiness and assiduity. This important exercise was finished by sacred canticles. Piety gained doubly hereby, Christian doctrine was agreeably instilled into their minds, and bad songs were forgotten.

As soon as the people were touched by the truths that were announced to them, the fathers seated themselves in the confessionals, where they passed nine hours a day,—five in the morning and four in the afternoon. Those who were not all that time in the confessional were not less holily employed. To visit and console the sick, to give a fraternal correction to impenitent sinners, to appease family dissensions, to reconcile enemies, to establish peace between pastor and people, to teach school-masters and mistresses how to discharge their duties well, to establish the association of charity for comforting the poor, in a word, to prevent evil and to do all possible good, were the ends the Founder of the Missions proposed to himself, and which were accomplished in the course of the mission.

Ecclesiastics in the different places where the missionaries labor, especially where there are a number of them, are objects, also, for their zeal. They are assembled on certain fixed days, reminded of the primitive engagements of their profes-

sion, entertained on the principal virtues of which they have the greatest need in their calling,—of the dangers of idleness in the country,—of the necessity of watching over themselves to be able to watch over their flock usefully, of the terrible account they will have to render if they fail often to break the bread of the Word, and of their obligation to perpetuate the good which even the least successful missions effect in parishes. In passing, I would remark that the missionaries are never the accusers of the clergy, nor of the people, because, said Vincent, if the faults of the clergy are hidden, it is not right to divulge them, and if public, bishops will not fail to learn them elsewhere.

When the devotion of the heads of families and other communicants is satisfied, they prepare such for first communion as are considered capable of making it. To the help which they have given them with this view, during the mission, they add, on the eve of the great day, a lively and tender exhortation, which, though proper to prepare these young hearts for the reception of the Lamb without stain, is, nevertheless, followed on the morrow by another, immediately before communion. This day, on which the coldest piety rekindles at the sight of a number of children, full of faith and love, is usually the last day of the mission. It is finished by a solemn procession, in which the first communicants, bearing lighted wax tapers, render their homages to Him, who has given Himself to them. Little children that are not capable of making their

first communion, but are yet only too capable of offending God, have part in the fruits of the mission. They are inspired with a holy horror of sin, taught modesty in church, made to conceive a sorrow for their faults, and instructed to confess hereafter with sincerity and confidence.

As regards the missionaries, Vincent required of them a lively faith and perfect confidence in God, so that they might not succumb under the trials and contradictions by which their ministry is often crossed; a mortification, proof against every trial, to sustain the tedium of labor, the inconvenience of lodgings and the rigor of seasons; an invincible patience, also, to endure the coarse rusticity of those who are the principal objects of their cares; a simplicity, full of prudence, to instruct them, to lead them to God; a great indifference to employments, places, time and persons; to have no other will than that of God; in fine, a profound humility, an unalterable meekness, especially when there is question of treating with heretics.

Some, either with good or bad intentions, have sought to make an objection weigh against the missions, which may be reduced to this,—that the missions lasted too short a time to produce fruit of moment, that the heart is not corrected in so short a time, that the change seen after them could be but a passing emotion and the effect of the novelty of the spectacle; that an exact confession of the most enormous fault, and even of such as shame had till then suppressed, proved well that the imagination

had been struck, but not that the heart was converted; in fine, that to give absolution upon such weak indications is to expose the minister and penitent to sacrilege.

To reply to this reasoning, it is almost sufficient to remark that the church approves missions, that it has opened its treasures in their favor, that it encourages them in all days, by the ministry of her Pontiffs; that the bishops of the last century have bestowed on them the greatest eulogies, and that it is by means of these exercises that a Xavier, a Francis de Sales, Eudes and Vincent de Paul have gained to Jesus Christ millions of infidels, and of others not much better. Is it probable that a practice, which, according to its opposers, would produce as much evil as good, could have gained so many approvers? But let us pass over this prejudice and examine things in themselves. It is said the missions can be abused. This is true, but what is there that can not be abused? Yet they can be turned to advantage. That they may occasion some sacrilegious communions, is also true, but without the missions ignorance and hypocrisy had continued until death. The dawn of conversion is taken for a true conversion, it is said,—this may be true, but it is true only for those who, out of the missions, violate the rules of the church, who have not patience to judge the tree by its fruit, or else, from want of light, confound the fruit with the first flowers? Four or five weeks suffice not always for a true discernment in so dangerous a matter, I allow, but in

missions, in the same vicinity, where from one parish fathers pass on to the next at no great distance, nothing is easier than to prove these old penitents, and to defer giving them the Bread of the Strong, so long as it is doubtful whether it will give them death or life. As to detached missions which are given in places where the missionaries leave for good when they are finished, it is for the pastors to dispose their people in good time, and for the missionaries to give them all the time they require. Vincent recommended this more than once in his letters. A little reflection suffices for such as have an upright heart, a prolonged discussion suffices not to such as consult God less than inclination from which even the just are not always exempt.

We shall finish this chapter by an analysis of a discourse that Vincent made to his brethren, upon the necessity of the missions. After having established, with St. Paul, that each one should walk on in his vocation, he said that giving missions is the chief employment of his congregation, since it is occupied with seminaries and aspirants to Holy Orders only in order to form men suited to preserve the fruits of the mission, and that in this, it imitates warriors, who, not to lose a place which they have taken at the point of the sword, set a good garrison in it. That to encourage themselves to give good missions, they ought to think that an interior voice says to each one of them: "Go forth, missionaries, go where I send you. Behold the poor souls awaiting you. Their salvation depends, in part, on your sermons and catechetical instructions.

What would we answer God if it happen, through our fault, that any one of these poor souls should die, and be lost? Would we not have to reproach ourselves that we were the cause of their damnation for not having assisted them as we ought? And ought we not to fear that an account will be demanded of us at the hour of our death? On the contrary, if we but correspond faithfully to the obligations of our vocation, shall we not have reason to hope that God will increase His graces, day by day, that He will bless our labors, and that, in fine, all those souls that shall obtain salvation by our ministry, will render testimony to God of our fidelity to our duties?"

After having inferred from this text of Scripture: "*Evangelizare pauperibus misit me*," that the sanctification of the poor was one of the principal offices of the Savior, Vincent made his priests feel how dangerous it would be to neglect these members of Christ, abject in the eyes of men, but great, indeed, before God. He applied to them these words of St. Ambrose: *Si non pavisti, occidisti.* "Words still truer," said he, "when there is question of nourishment for the soul than when there is only question of that for the body." Hence, he concluded, that a missionary ought to tremble, if on account of age or pretext of infirmity, he relents in his duty and forgets that God leaves to him the salvation of the poor, since the salvation of the poor is a duty with which he is charged before God.

The Saint afterwards objected, in the name of such as may be too anxious for the preservation of

their health, that the labor of the missions might shorten their days. "But," he replied, with St. Paul, who desired only death to be sooner with Jesus Christ, "is it then a misfortune for him who travels in a foreign country, to advance in his way, and to approach his own land? Is it a misfortune for the voyager to near the port? Is it a misfortune for a faithful soul to go to see and possess God? In fine, is it a misfortune for missionaries to go soon to enjoy the glory that their Divine Master has merited for them by His sufferings and death? What! are we afraid to see that come which we cannot sufficiently desire, and which always comes too late? Now, that which I can say to priests, I say to those, also, who are not priests. Yes, my brothers, you are, like us, under the obligation of laboring for the salvation of the poor. You can do it in your way. You are obliged to do it, because you are members of one and the same body with us, even as all the members of the sacred body of Jesus Christ co-operated, each in its turn, to the work of redemption, for, if His head was pierced with thorns, His feet were pierced with nails, and if after the resurrection this sacred Head was crowned with glory, the feet also participated therein."

Thus spoke the holy man, and from his first mission, in Genoa, to his death, he never changed. "It would be too fortunate for me," said he, "to finish my life in a wood while traveling to some village." A large number of ecclesiastics of learning, piety and rank, attracted by his example, joined him in

his labors. It was under these auspices that Rochechourd, Fouquet, Pavillon, Vialard and Perrochel directed the first efforts of their zeal, and labored often in such places as the regulations of his institute would not permit him to labor. He had some priests united to him by no other tie than that of charity, sometimes, indeed, unacquainted with him, except by the fame of the success attending his labors, or the good he accomplished in provinces, or what they had seen him do in the Isle of France and the country round. How many missions he gave is not well known, but it is certain that whilst he was in the house of Gondi, he gave nearly fifty in the cities and towns depending on that illustrious family. He gave, either himself or his brethren, at least one hundred and forty from 1625 to 1632. The house of St. Lazarus, during the life of St. Vincent, alone gave nearly seven hundred, in several of which he had himself labored with fruit. We may join to this number, already so large, those made before his death, in more than twenty-five dioceses in France, Poland and Italy by his children, who were established in those places.

His first biographer says: "Who can conceive the greatness, the extent and multiplicity of blessings which have resulted to the glory of God and unity of His Church? Who can tell how many who were in a criminal ignorance of the things of salvation have been instructed in the truths that they were obliged to know? How many, who all their life, had been wallowing in the mire of sin,

were drawn out of it by good general confessions? How many enmities have been rooted out, usuries relinquished, bad marriages made valid, restitutions effected, concubinages and scandals removed? How many exercises of religion and of practical charity established in places where the very names of charity and religion seemed unknown? How many alms dispensed by persons who had, heretofore, appeared incapable of mercy? Consequently, how many souls sanctified, who, otherwise, in place of the glory which they this day enjoy in the bosom of God, would have been with the demons in hell?

XXVI.

HIS MORTIFICATION.

If it is glorious to follow the Lord, it must be acknowledged there is nothing that costs more to nature, since the first step to be taken by those who wish to walk in His footsteps is to renounce themselves and bear their cross. That which the Saint found so difficult, he did every moment of his life. With the most exact truthfulness it is said of him, that under the shadow of a common life, interior and exterior mortification was, perhaps, the virtue which of all others he most constantly practised.

By interior mortification, I understand that which has for its immediate object, the judgment, the will, the promptings of the heart, the dearest inclinations of nature. By exterior mortification, I understand that which crucifies all the senses. To make known to what extent he carried both one and the other, we have but to follow the procès verbal of his canonization.

His interior mortification appears conspicuous in the change it effected in his disposition. Combat nature as we will, it almost always revives. If repressed on occasions that are foreseen, it betrays itself in sudden encounters. Rarely does a man, in studying another man, fail to discover, sooner or later, what he had not at first perceived. Vincent had, naturally, an austere and somewhat harsh appearance; however, he knew so well how to curb nature, that he was always considered, by those who knew him, to be a model of meekness and affability. He himself looked upon this change as a kind of miracle, and attributed it to the piety of those who had warned him to assume a less gloomy and austere expression of countenance. So powerfully had he combated self love that to judge of him only by appearances, we might doubt if, in this respect, he were a child of Adam. He was silent about nothing that could make him contemned, he concealed all that could redound to his glory. Mr. Daulier, secretary to the King, had been a slave at Algiers, and he knew that Vincent had been one at Tunis. As he freely related his adventures to Vincent, he

would have been delighted to hear the Saint recount his. He introduced the subject purposely to induce the Saint to speak, but he acknowledged, in his deposition, that he could never draw a word from Vincent on the subject. Twenty times, in the assemblies of the Ladies, over which Vincent presided, he had occasion to say something about the time of his slavery,—twenty times he kept silence.

That kind of indifference which he seemed to have for his relations, was, in him, the effect of the most lively and continual mortification. "Do you think," said he, to some one who pressed him to give them help, "that I do not love my relations? I have for them every sentiment of tenderness and affection that one can have for his own, and this natural love urges me sufficiently to assist them, but I should act according to the impulses of *grace* and not according to those of *nature*, and think rather of the more abandoned poor, without stopping at the ties of friendship or relationship. I should imitate that Son, so holy and tender, who on a public occasion, seemed to know neither Mother nor brethren, and in dispensing my alms consider my nearest relations, not those who are really so, but those who have the greatest need of being aided. Alas! are not my relations very happy? And could they be better off than in a condition wherein they fulfill the sentence passed by God, that man should earn his bread by the sweat of his brow?" These principles, so severe to a heart like his, were adhered to by the Saint, as if he could not absolutely be diverted from

them. One of his friends, towards the end of the year 1650, gave him one thousand francs for his relations. The man of God refused not the gift, but he told his benefactor that his family could live as they had lived until then, that this new assistance would not render them more virtuous, but that he believed a good mission given in their parish would be of more value before God and man. This friend yielded to these reasons, but the Saint found no opportunity of executing this project,—civil wars arising unexpectedly, Guienne was desolated. The relatives of Vincent de Paul were among the most badly treated; everything was taken from them, and some of them lost their lives. The holy man saw then that it was by a special Providence of God that he had not been able to send missionaries to Pocy. He blessed God for so visible a protection. He forwarded, in haste, the help that Heaven had prepared for his family. This was the only favor conferred on his relations, by a man to whom it had been easy to put them at their ease, but his inclination led him less to do this than to draw them out of misery. How dead must one be to his own and to himself, to embrace so rigorous a system and never depart from it!

Need we any other proof of the interior mortification of our Saint than his perfect equality of mind? He possessed this to such a high degree, that he did, by a movement of grace, the calm of his passions, and exact conformity to the will of God, what the sage of the stoics did only through osten

tation. His biography furnishes us proofs of this, which we could hardly find in the life of the greatest Saint. He is represented tranquil amid the troubles of war as in the bosom of peace, in illness as in the best of health, in good success as in the most disastrous events. To attain to this, a man must, so to say, live no more, or live only, like St. Paul, of the life of Jesus Christ. The old man and all his desires must be buried, we must know neither inclination nor desire. We may still have them,—indeed, it is impossible not to have them. "But," said Mr. Almeras, his successor, "Vincent was so master of his passions that although I endeavored to study him, I could discover none."

It was not so with his exterior mortifications,—notwithstanding the precaution he took to hide them, in part, or to disguise them, enough is known to judge him worthy of a distinguished place among illustrious penitents. We learn from the procès verbal of his canonization that Vincent rarely retired before midnight, because the important affairs that almost overwhelmed him did not allow him to retire earlier. A poor straw bed was his only couch. Well or ill, he rose regularly at four in the morning. On awakening he took the discipline. A brother, whose apartment was next to his, assures us that he never once failed, during the twelve years that he was his neighbor. He joined other austerities to this, to obtain of God special graces, or to disarm His anger in times of public calamity. Cilice, bracelets and pointed cinctures,

were instruments whose use was familiar to him. The hair shirt, with which he, from time to time, replaced them, and which is still preserved, makes those tremble who are most accustomed to mortification. Yet it was but by chance that the degree and measure of his penances were discovered, because he was as careful to hide them as he was eager to practice them.

Every morning, even during the most severe winters, he gave more than three hours to prayer, to preparation for mass and thanksgiving. He remained upon his knees upon the pavement, never allowing a mat to be placed where he was accustomed to kneel. Severe, and almost a murderer of his body, notwithstanding the swelling of his legs and a quartan fever which returned to him twice every year, he labored as closely as if he had enjoyed the best of health. Besides the fasts prescribed by the Church, and from which he never dispensed himself, he generally fasted twice a week,—neither infirmities nor old age could induce him to relinquish the habit. His food was always the most common,—there was no difference in the quality or quantity served to him and to the rest of his brethren. The least savory part was always chosen by him, and, fearing to flatter that sensuality which insinuates itself everywhere, he scattered a bitter powder over his food, which rendered its taste disagreeable. He ate and drank very little wherever he might be,—not from want of appetite, but from a habit of never satisfying it. When he went to second

table, he sat with the servants to be helped to what was left from the first table. If he came after all were served, and his wine had been taken away, he asked for none, but contented himself with pure water, although no one had greater need than he of something strengthening. At whatever hour he returned to dine, whether two or three hours after noon, he was always fasting.

When sixty years old he fasted more rigorously than a man in the flower of his age. Codfish, herrings, and other salt fish, were his food, as they were that of the community. The cook once wished to deceive him, by serving up at second table fresh fish, instead of salt fish, which had been served to his brethren, but this innocent artifice was soon discovered by one whose love of mortification rendered him vigilant. He found out what they had given to the others, and insisted on being treated like them, or else he would take nothing at all. His collation in the evening was made up of bread, an apple and some wine and water. Sometimes, and even when it was neither a fast day, nor a day of abstinence, if he came from the city rather late, he would retire without eating. In fine, he was so severe with himself that the Cardinal de la Rochefoucault, being informed of it, begged him to moderate his austerities and prolong, for the good of the Church, those days from which God wished to draw His glory.

What recreates other men became for him, by the sacrifices which he joined to every act, a subject of

mortification. A traveller through the country takes pleasure in contemplating the beauty and variety of the landscape,—Vincent knew purer joys. He cast his eyes upon a small crucifix which he held in his hands. The image of his Savior was his whole consolation,—he wished for no other. He was never seen to pluck or to smell a flower—nature entered not into his reckoning, and he had made a kind of vow to give it nothing. But the bad odor breathed in hospitals, or in the houses of the sick poor, were to him, it seemed, like that of lilies and roses.

As he employed his tongue only to recommend virtue, or to combat vice, so he opened not his ears but to discourses which tended to good. His rule was to shut them to vain curiosities, useless news, and much more to anything that might wound charity, as well as to the praises which it was impossible to refuse him. He acted not thus when there met his ears words which revenge and spite lavished upon him from time to time. The most humiliating expression never made him lose the equilibrium of his soul. The only pain he felt was that God should be offended.

Inclination was so subdued in him that he seemto have no perception. Cold and heat, good and bad, were equally indifferent to him. There are few who can say that they do not like one kind of food better than another. The children of Vincent could never discern which kind he preferred, although they studied his appetite, being eager to

preserve it. He took long draughts, and at different times, of the most bitter and nauseous medicines. He ate only because it is a duty for men not to allow themselves to die of hunger.

Although such an example is more valuable than all the lessons in the world, the Saint did not omit giving some very solid lessons, also, upon the two-fold mortification of which we have spoken. "The words of the Savior, 'If any one will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me,' trace the first step to be taken in Christianity. These words are hearkened to, however, only by very few—for it is as on another occasion, when the Son of God said: '*Non omnes capiunt verbum istud.* All do not receive this word.' The number of those who give themselves to Jesus Christ, to follow Him under such rigorous conditions is very small. Out of so many thousands, who, during His mortal life, ran to hear Him, there were few that did not abandon Him because they failed in the first disposition which He exacts from His disciples; namely, sincere love of mortification and of the cross." From this, the Saint, according to custom, passed on to the practical detail, without which general principles serve but little,—he made it evident that true mortification gives no quarter to soul or body, and that it sacrifices the judgment, the will, the senses, the passions, the most tender and natural inclinations. The judgment, inclining man to esteem his own ideas less than those of others; the will, making him follow the example of Him,

who, during the whole course of His life, never did His own will, but always that of His Father: "*Quæ placita sunt ei facio semper;*" the senses, holding them always in subjection to God, and particularly in watching unceasingly over the curiosity to see and hear, a curiosity so dangerous and which has so much power to turn the mind from God; in fine, inclinations the most natural, and principally that one predominating in many, the desire to preserve health. "For," added he, "that immoderate solicitude for preserving health, and that excessive fear of suffering some inconvenience, which we see in some, which fixes all their attention on the care of a paltry life, are great hindrances to the service of God, and prevent them from freely following Jesus Christ. O! my brethren, we are the disciples of this Divine Savior, and yet He finds us bound in chains, as so many slaves. To what? To a little health. . . . . O, my Savior! grant us the grace to divest ourselves of ourselves, make us, we beseech Thee, to hate ourselves, so that we may love Thee more perfectly,—Thou who art the source of all perfection, and the mortal enemy of sensuality. Give us the spirit of mortification and the grace always to resist self love, the root of all our sensuality."

An implacable enemy to sensuality, he combated the very semblance of it. "There is no vice," said he to his children, "more opposed to the spirit that should animate you, and better suited to make you lose a relish for your duties. A missionary should

live as if he had no body, and fear neither heat nor cold, sickness nor hunger, nor any of the miseries of life. He should esteem himself happy to suffer something for Jesus Christ, and if he shuns troubles, labor and inconveniences, he is unworthy of his name, and can accomplish nothing. A small number of priests, who have renounced themselves and their satisfactions, will effect more than a crowd of others who fear nothing more than to enfeeble their health. The latter believe themselves wise. Their wisdom is carnal—it is the *spirit of the flesh.* Miserable is he who flies the cross, for he will find such heavy ones that they will overwhelm him!

XXVII.

HIS OCCUPATIONS.

Vincent looked upon himself as a useless servant, yet he was so fully occupied from morning until evening that his life was but a tissue of good works. One less laborious, less supported by grace, would have succumbed under such multiplied and perplexing duties. We cannot conceive how a man so infirm, and who never omitted his exercises of piety, could complete so many dissimilar occupations, terminate so many affairs having neither bond nor connection, reply as he did to that prodigious heap of

letters, which he received from all parts, and train up with attention the two companies which he had instituted. These occupations were often deranged by adverse circumstances, but the Saint knew admirably well how to restore order. He seized the opportunity of effecting a new good work, without losing sight of that which he had been planning. The Archbishop of Paris claimed his services on many occasions.

Although his life was one of continual labor, we may say that he avenged himself upon time at the approach of eternity. There remains but a very small portion of the letters which he wrote to different parts of France, Italy, Barbary, and into the most distant countries, yet they are in so large a number that their multitude affrights, as well as does the diversity of matters upon which he was obliged to reply. At one time, it is a bishop, a priest of the highest distinction, or an enlightened director, who consults him upon the most delicate and important affairs. At another, it is some princesses who ask him to have missions given in their domains,—an assistance which he never refuses,—or permission to enter into some of the monasteries of ladies, of which he was superior,—permissions which he almost always refused. Sometimes, it is the College of the Propaganda, which entreats him to send his children to Cairo; sometimes, it is Mr. de la Meilleraie, who asks them for foreign countries; sometimes, it is an afflicted mother from the remotest part of the Kingdom where his charity

has made him well known, who prays him to interest himself for a son in captivity in Algiers, and who is in danger of losing his life or his faith. One day, it is a renegade who writes to him from Algiers, to induce him, in his charity, to find means for him to repair his apostacy. Another day, it is an Abbess, who, disheartened at the difficulties of governing, knows not what to do. To-day, it is a young girl, who, after some months of noviciate, is tempted to draw back and look behind her. To-morrow it will be the nuncios of Bagni and Piccolomini, who wish, either verbally or in writing, to have his advice upon different points regarding either the particular welfare of some dioceses, or the good of the entire church. Frequently it is some wise religious, who recur to him, as to a father always ready to aid them, either in the reformation of their orders or in other intricate affairs. More frequently it will be the illustrious house of Fénélon, to which, to hinder opposition to a certain marriage, he predicts that a son will be born of this marriage who will be the glory of his name. In the morning it will be the head of an association to form with him some one of those opinions of which policy may disapprove, but of which equity and religion will always approve. In the evening, it is a missionary who is wanting in stability, or needs to be roused to his first fervor; sometimes, it is some virtuous priests who know neither comfort nor repose, and whose zeal he must moderate to make it more abiding. The answers, without number, are all full of the

spirit of him who wrote them. Humility, meekness, charity, submission in everything to the will of God, are uniformly the seal with which they are stamped. Those of the year 1636 form two large volumes, while not a shadow of bitterness is seen in any except one which, although the person to whom it was addressed had merited more, we learn from a postscript added to it, that our Saint did not wish to send because he found it too severe.

Reasoning upon human principles, some defects in arrangement would be hardly reprehensible in a man, who, overloaded with the greatest affairs, would seem debarred from treating otherwise than superficially the details of the passing time. While Vincent was called off by persons abroad and at home, he was occupied closely with a multitude of holy and painful works. Then it was that he labored to banish beggary from Paris, and to obtain success for the plan of a general hospital. Then it was that he sought to console those of his brethren, who, in spite of Cromwell, had penetrated into Scotland and the Hebrides; then it was that he received the saddest news of the desolation of Picardy, Champagne and Lorraine, and that, to prevent their entire ruin, he forwarded immense sums in alms; then it was that almost overwhelmed with his great losses in Madagascar, he took measures to repair them and almost to force the Sun of Justice to shine upon a country that he believed ready to receive its influences. Then it was that he sent abundant supplies to the Christians of Mount Lebanon. In fine, then

it was that he tried to put a stop to that series of insults continually endured by his children in Algiers, from a people that knew no other law than that of the most insatiable cupidity.

As long as Vincent lived, the house of St. Lazarus was always like that spoken of in the Scripture, in the time of the last judges of Israel, the house of the prophet. It was a rendezvous, whither all who designed to undertake any good work, repaired from Paris and from the provinces, to draw from the lights of the man of God the counsel of which they had need. Moreover, beside the usual assemblies to which he repaired regularly, three times a week, he was often called to the deliberations of prelates, doctors, superiors of communities, and other persons of every rank, either to put a stop to some great disorder, or to establish a good government; either to restore peace in a monastery or in a family. Except during the time that he gave to his annual retreat, he went out every day upon affairs of charity, which drew him away from his solitude. On returning to his house, he listened, after reciting his office on his knees, to those from abroad or at home, who had business with him. If to these grave cares we join those which he bestowed on the different houses of his congregation, the Daughters of Charity and the religious of the Visitation, over whom, till his death, he had a special care, may we not allow that his years were full, and that he knew none of those void months condemned in Scripture?

Although the glory of God was the only motive

of the holy priest in his enterprises, all of them did not succeed. As fields know some sterile years, wherein the hopes of the laborer are more or less deceived, there are also for the works of God some seasons in which He seems to sleep respecting His most faithful servants. The apostles more than once experienced this, and so did Vincent.

We are surprised to hear of great employments where there is question of the case of a man who is advancing with rapid strides to the house of his eternity. It is, however, true that our Saint was overwhelmed with them, and that even to the day which preceded the eve of his death, he discharged his duties with an admirable judgment and presence of mind. He often assembled the officers and assistants of his house. He spoke to them altogether or separately, as circumstances seemed to require; he made them render an account of the state of affairs, deliberated with them, regulated the missions, designated those most suited for them, and agreed with those chosen on the manner in which they should act to ensure success. He did for the companies abroad with which he was charged what he had effected for his own congregation. He sent some of his priests to represent him in places to which he could not go, and when there was question of some business of importance, he gave them so detailed an instruction, that they had only to obey. Judging from his written answers, it might be thought that his health was almost always in the same state. In consequence, he received an infinite

number of letters, to which he never failed to reply. Although he wrote on every kind of subject, he wrote more willingly in behalf of misery and indigence. We notice that his last letters concern the necessities and relief of the poor of Champagne and Picardy.

In the tumult of affairs and in the midst of the importunities of a crowd of people of every rank which besieged him, he always appeared the man of peace and consolation. In fine, he joined the office of Martha so well with that of Mary, that when he appeared the most engrossed exteriorly, it was evident that he labored only for God and under the eye of God. If to so many occupations we join the exercises of piety, from which the holy man, however overburthened in every other respect, never dispensed himself, we will see that he knew the value of time. He would have scrupled losing an instant. Thus did he double his years in the sight of God. He retired the last of all. During the day he was almost always occupied in prayer, taking or giving counsel, forming deliberations and executing them. His priests after every repast had nearly an hour for recreation. As for him, he rarely took it, because he usually had something more pressing to do. In fine, although he gave to those who spoke to him and especially to strangers, leisure to tell him all that he had need to know to be able to serve them, he was, nevertheless, attentive to escape useless conversation. He avoided digressions even in his pious assemblies on business

for the poor. As precise in his words as he was just in his ideas, he brought those back to the point who had departed from it, but he did it with so much grace that no one could find fault. He had the strength of an indefatigable mind to apply to the greatest affairs, and the most astonishing facility to quit all in favor of the weak and simple who came to interrupt him. Every day in the last years of his life, the servant of God, to dispose himself for death, recited the prayers of the agonizing with the recommendation of the soul, and in the evening placed himself in a state to answer to his Sovereign Judge, in case that on that night God should deem it meet to call him to himself.

XXVIII.

HIS PATIENCE.

Afflictions were so sweet a food to Vincent that he languished when he was not satiated therewith in his own person or in that of his children. "Our congregation," said he, to his brethren, "suffers nothing, everything succeeds, and God, without making us experience any reverses, any agitation, blesses it in every way,—this great calm gives me uneasiness, for God is wont to try those who serve Him and to chasten those who love Him: '*Quem enim diligit Dominus, castigat.*' I remember that

it is related of St. Ambrose, that having learned of the master of a house into which he had entered on one of his journeys, that he did not know what affliction was, the Saint went out abruptly, saying to those who accompanied him: 'Let us go forth, because the wrath of God is about to fall upon this house.' It did, indeed, for a moment after a thunderbolt having overturned it, all its inmates were buried in its ruins. On the other side, I see several other companies troubled from time to time, and suffering fearful persecutions, and I say: Behold how God would treat us if we were strong in virtue, but knowing our weakness, He nourishes us with milk like little children, and enables us to succeed in everything, almost without our concerning ourselves. I have reason, then, to fear that we are not pleasing to God, nor worthy to suffer for His love. It is true that our brethren have suffered shipwrecks after embarking for Madagascar, but God drew them forth safe from the danger. It is true that in the war of 1643, we lost forty-two thousand livres, but this loss was not ours singly, for every one felt the public trouble, the evil was general, and we were not treated differently from the rest. But blessed be God, my brethren, for it is now pleasing to his adorable providence to take from us a property that is a heavy loss to the company. Let us accept this trial as Job accepted his—let us humble ourselves under the Hand of God who smites us, saying, with David: 'I have kept silence, O Lord, for Thou hast done it. '*Obmutui et non aperui*

os meum, quoniam tu fecisti.' Let us adore his justice and believe that it is in mercy that He thus treats us for He doeth all things well.—'*Bene omnia fecit.*'"

What the Saint said to his assembled community he repeated to the superior of one of his houses, who had declared to him his difficulties in governing. "Alas, sir, would you wish to suffer nothing? Would it not be better to be possessed than to be without a cross? Yes, for a demon in the body would not harm the soul, but if you had nothing to suffer in soul or body you would not be conformed to Jesus Christ suffering, and, nevertheless, this conformity is the mark of our predestination, so be not surprised at your trials, since the Son of God has chosen them for our salvation. Is not your heart much consoled at seeing that it has been found worthy before God to suffer while serving Him? Certainly you owe Him special thanks, and you are bound to ask His grace to make a good use of your trials. We must go to God through evil report and good report: '*Per infamiam et bonam famam.*' His divine Goodness deals mercifully with us when it is pleased to allow us to be censured and publicly contemned. I doubt not but that you have received with patience the confusion that has just fallen on us. If the *glory* of the world is but smoke, the contrary is a solid good when received as it should be, and I hope a great blessing will spring from this humiliation. May it please God to send us so many more that we may merit by them to please Him.

Let us sigh for the cross, and say, with the apostle of the Indies: 'Yet more, O Lord, yet more.'"

The patience of the Saint amid sufferings, or rather his relish for sufferings, never appeared so conspicuously as in sickness. A missionary, touched at the state in which he saw this worthy old man, said, on the impulse of the moment: "Oh, sir, your pains are dreadful." "What," the holy sufferer replied quickly, "do you call the work of God dreadful, and that which He ordains to chasten a poor sinner like me? God forgive you for what you have said, for this is not speaking in the language of Jesus Christ. Is it not just that the guilty should suffer, and are we not dearer to God than to ourselves? Sickness is almost an insupportable state to nature, and yet it is, nevertheless, one of the most powerful means to recall us to our duty, to detach us from affection to sin, and to fill us with His gifts and graces. It is by it that souls are purified, and that those without virtue are furnished with an efficacious means of acquiring it. There is not a more suitable state for practising it—it is in sickness that faith is wonderfully exercised, hope shines out more brightly; that resignation, love of God, and every virtue find ample exercise."

Vincent was subject to a slight fever, which lasted sometimes four or five days, and sometimes fifteen or more. To see him during the course of this disease, which was at the same time both periodical and irregular, it would have been supposed he was in perfect health. He attended to the regular ex-

ercises and to business as if he suffered nothing. yet, each night was a kind of martyrdom to him. Sweats were the only means to relieve him promptly. To procure them he was obliged, in the greatest heats of summer, to put three coverlets on his bed and have near him two large tin flasks filled with boiling water. In this state, more insupportable than the evil he wished to remedy, he passed entire nights, and what nights! No sleep, no repose, no truce from the restlessness produced by a stifling heat! In fine, he rose from bed like one who comes out of a bath. However much he needed help, he permitted none to be rendered to him. The feeble state to which such long sweats reduced him, joined to sleeplessness, was for him a new exercise of patience. He had unceasingly to struggle against sleep, and if sometimes, notwithstanding all his efforts, he succumbed to it, he asked pardon *for his misery* without revealing the cause of his drowsiness.

With this fever was joined a quartan fever twice a year. He treated this like the other, of which we have just spoken. Under like circumstances he would have sent to the infirmary the last of his brethren, but he acted not thus towards himself. It was not until he was past eighty years that the weakness of his body began to balance, somewhat, the vigor and strength of his courage. It must be acknowledged that the remainder of the Saint's life was but a complication of distempers. In 1656, the holy priest had a fever for some days continu-

ally, which ended by a great inflammation of his leg. Then, in spite of himself, he had to keep his bed for some time. This occasion was profited by to induce him to have a fire in his apartment, to which he would never before consent. This slight relief became soon more necessary than ever—the swelling of his legs grew so great that to support the pain, he had need of all the patience of the Saints. The evil progressed—it reached his knees, and, in the end, his right leg ruptured all the way down to the foot. Two years after, new ulcers formed in it, and the pain of the knee being always on the increase, it was no longer possible, after the beginning of 1659, to the servant of God to leave his house. He continued, however, for some time to go down to prayers with his community, and to say Mass in the church, but at the end of that year he could go down no more,—he was obliged to celebrate in the chapel of the infirmary. Sometime after, his limbs failed so absolutely that he was unable to ascend the altar. He was then obliged to be content with hearing Mass, and he continued to hear it until the day of his decease.

To his habitual infirmities was joined the stone which tried him cruelly. He passed five or six hours of the night on a simple straw bed, less for repose than to find new sufferings. In truth, the bad humors which ran from the ulcers in his legs during the day, accumulated around the joints of his knees at night, causing him redoubled pains, whose continuation and violence wasted and consumed him,

inch by inch. "O, Lord," said St. Bernard, "if you thus treat your friends, even in the time of mercy, what will you inflict on your enemies in the hour of vengeance?"

In so trying a state, the holy man had no need of new trials, but because he was just it was necessary that he should be satiated with tribulations. In less than four months, death snatched from him three persons, who were the support of his old age, —Mr. du Portail, Mademoiselle Le Gras, and Mr. de Tournus. So many severe blows seemed enough to suffice the justice of Him, whose penetrating eye sees hay and stubble in the most beautiful works, and who, in mercy, causes that to be expiated in life which His severity could expiate after death. However, as if God in treating thus rigorously the green wood, wished to manifest what he had prepared for the dry, Vincent saw himself in danger of losing René Almeras, the first man in his congregation, and his immediate successor.

The extremity to which the Saint was reduced made him know full well that his course was almost finished. Neither decay nor alteration was perceptible in his mind, however—disease, which sometimes dispirits those who suffer much, and for a long time, seemed to have a contrary effect on him. Those from abroad and at home, who saw him at all hours of the day, remarked, always, his serene air, smiling countenance, that same tone of voice, and manners full of gentleness, that had gained all hearts. When asked about his sickness, he spoke

of it in such a way as to make it seem a trifling ailment; he would then change the subject, and from his own pains, which he wished forgotten, he passed to those of the persons who spoke to him, to compassionate theirs. When the extremity of pain became most agonizing, only these words were heard from his mouth, pronounced by him with much tenderness: "*Ah, my Savior, my good Savior!*" He would then fix his eyes on the image of Jesus fastened to the cross which was opposite him. He drew from Him, alone, fortitude to endure his sickness.

Sentiments so religious were supported by Christian principles. First, then, the holy man remarked in the life of the Savior, that this great model had experienced the severest trials, that hatred pursued Him until it conducted Him to Calvary, that He promised only crosses and bad treatment to His apostles, and that since the disciple is a perfect disciple only when he resembles His master, it is just that we should suffer as He suffered.

The second principle which rendered Vincent so tranquil in the midst of the most violent trials, was that while, on one side, trials happen not but by the will of God, according to those words of the prophet: "*Si est malum in civitate, quod non fecerit Dominus*" so, on the other, God afflicts His servants only because He has designs of mercy upon them. Hence, he concluded that those who suffer are cherished by heaven, and the more cherished when they receive trial upon trial and desolation upon

desolation. "A single day of temptations produces more merit than many years of tranquility, —a soul which is always in repose is like to stagnant waters which become miry and infectious, —on the contrary, those that are tried by tribulation resemble rivers that run amidst rocks and pebbles, and whose waters are rendered therein sweeter and more limpid. Crosses teach us not only patience but compassion, also, towards our neighbor. It was, in part, for this that we might have in Him one who could compassionate our infirmities, that Jesus Christ has suffered so much."

In fine, his last principle was that of St. Paul, that God never permits us to be afflicted or tempted above our strength, but that He aids us by His grace to draw fruit from the trials and contradictions that prove us. He maintained that these trials and contradictions are as a pledge of the happiest success. In truth, he had more than a hundred times experienced that the missions, and other exercises of his congregation, never effected more than when they cost much to nature. From this principle he said, speaking of a violent storm that raged against some of his priests, that if they reaped the same benefit by it as did the apostles from their persecutions, they would confound the demon by the same weapons which he had employed against them. In the same spirit he encouraged a virtuous abbess, who was persecuted on account of a reform that she wished to introduce into her abbey, saying:

"Be not dismayed at the vexations you endure, because sufferings in efforts to effect permanent good draw down the necessary graces for success."

XXIX.

HIS POVERTY.

Detachment from all earthly things, of which we have spoken in chapter twelfth, in part gave birth to the great love which Vincent had for poverty. Although he knew not the designs of God over him, nor had reason to think about forming an establishment, he has confessed that he felt an indefinable, secret impulse, which made him desire to have nothing of his own, and to live in community. God granted him both the one and the other. He saw himself the father of a numerous family, and if the state in which Providence placed him had not been incompatible with a true proprietorship, he had known well how to make it compatible with a very rigorous poverty. His rule was to take for himself the worst of all. He wore his clothes as long as he could, and, to have new ones at least as rarely as possible, he took those that persons of about his size had already worn. Notwithstanding this, he possessed the tact of being as neatly arranged as persons of his position should be. The obligation of

going often to court and attending councils, made no change in his costume,—he appeared before Kings as he appeared before his community. The Cardinal Mazarin one day, taking hold of his cincture, which was a little frayed, said to the company around the Queen: "See how Mr. Vincent is attired to come to court, and what a fine cincture he wears." Perhaps at death, that rich minister would have wished to exchange his soul and lot with the poor priest.

His food corresponded with his garments as well as his lodgings. As to food, there was no distinction between him and his brethren except his more austere abstinence. He was delighted when something was wanting, or when he was able to make his repast on a morsel which another would not have taken. His conduct was the same in sickness. Infirm as he was, he believed himself forbidden everything that was not allowed his brethren. The example of the apostle of the Indies begging his bread, seemed admirable to him; he sometimes imitated it in the country, where, pressed by hunger and without money, for he rarely carried any money about his person, he would go to the house of some peasant and ask for a piece of bread for the love of God. Notwithstanding his more than sobriety in the use of food, he reproached himself because he saw in himself only a useless servant who had no right to his support, hence that expression which was so familiar to him, and which suited him so illy: "Ah! miserable being, you have not earned the bread you eat."

His lodgings and the furniture of his apartment were the most simple that can be conceived. An apartment without chimney, a couch without curtains, a straw bed without mattress, a table without cover, walls without tapestry, two straw-bottomed chairs, one paper picture, and a wooden crucifix. This was all his furniture. "I own," said Mr. Chomel, first physician to the king, in his deposition, "that I was astonished when I saw a man of such merit and reputation lodged so miserably, and having no furniture but what was absolutely necessary."

The spirit of poverty followed him everywhere. If he was obliged to have a fire in winter he husbanded the wood for the poor,—the ornaments made for his church he wished reserved for solemn feasts,—the usual material was camlet. When articles of furniture that were no longer serviceable were replaced by more expensive ones he would order the removal of the new. "The property of the house," said he, "is the property of the poor, we are stewards but not masters, and all that is superfluous in our expenses we shall be strictly accountable for. We are not religious, because it is not found well that we should be, nor are we worthy to be, but, nevertheless, it is true that poverty is the tie of communities, and particularly of ours. It is a knot which looses us from all earthly things, and attaches us perfectly to God. Alas! what will become of this company if it admits into it covetousness, which is, as says the apostle, the worst of all evils? . . . If this misfortune befall us how will

we live? It will be said: 'We have so many livres revenue we may live at our ease. Why so much labor? Let us leave labor to poor country people; let their pastors do what seems good to them, let us live quietly without putting ourselves to so much trouble.' Thus it is that idleness follows the spirit of avarice; each one tries to preserve and increase his temporal possessions and to seek his own satisfaction. Then may we say adieu to all the duties of the mission and to the missions themselves, for they will no longer be given. We have only to read history to find an infinite number of examples, which manifest that riches, and abundance of temporal goods, have caused the ruin not only of several ecclesiastics but also of entire communities, and that by not being faithful to their primitive spirit of poverty, they have fallen under a load of misery."

One of his priests represented to him one day the necessities of his house. "What do you do," asked the Saint of him, "when you thus fail in necessaries?" "I have recourse to God," he answered. "Ah! well," said Vincent, "this is what poverty effects, it makes us think of God, whereas, perhaps, we would forget Him if we had all that we needed. Hence it gives me great joy that voluntary and real poverty is practiced in all our houses,—under this poverty a grace is hidden which we do not know." "But," said the missionary, "you procure support for other poor and leave your brethren without it," "I pray God to pardon you these words," said the

holy man, "I like to think that you said them in all simplicity, but know that we are never richer than when we are like Jesus Christ."

This advice, supported by the striking example of him who gave it, made so lively an impression on the hearts of his children that, generally speaking, there was nothing on earth that could attach them. Vincent, who was never a great panegyrist of his brethren, especially in their presence, after having told them one day that a man who has the true spirit of poverty fears nothing, that he can do everything, and go everywhere, could not but do them justice: "By the mercy of God," said he, "this spirit is in the congregation. We must pray heaven to continue it, that we may esteem ourselves happy to die poor, after the example of our Savior, who began by a crib and finished by the cross."

XXX.

HIS PRUDENCE.

"Christian prudence," says Vincent, "tends to its end, and its end is always God,—it chooses the means, it regulates the actions and works, it does everything with deliberation, weight, number, and measure,—as its end is good so also are its motives. It consults reason, but as the light of reason is often

very weak, it consults more securely the maxims of that faith which Jesus Christ has taught us, because it knows that heaven and earth shall pass away, but that the words of the Man God will never pass away."

Acting upon these principles, the Saint, whenever he was consulted upon an affair, raised his heart to God to implore His assistance—he would even invite those who had asked his counsel to unite with him, that God might manifest his will about the matter upon which he was to deliberate. He listened afterwards most attentively to what was proposed to him, weighed it leisurely, and that no circumstance might escape him, he took care to inform himself of the facts of the case. If there was question of a matter of consequence, he asked some time to think of it, and advised, in the meantime, that it should be recommended to God. He was also well pleased that counsel should be asked of others; he willingly asked it and deferred always to the opinion of another, provided that justice and charity would not suffer thereby. In fine, when he was obliged to give his advice, he did so in a manner so judicious and so far removed from a decided style, that while doing all that he judged proper he left persons free to choose for themselves. If he was pressed to give advice absolutely, he spoke with precision and without ever attacking those who thought not with him. Afterwards he observed two things,—the first, to preserve under the seal of inviolable secresy the matter upon which

he had been consulted,—secondly, to remain firm in the opinion he had formed.

In following such just rules it was difficult that a man who was so remarkable for good sense, should take a false step. Hence, even to his death, he was looked upon as the most prudent man of his age. During his whole life the house of St. Lazarus, as we have already noticed, was a kind of centre, whither persons flocked who wished to render any considerable service to the church or to their neighbor. Bishops, magistrates, pastors, doctors, religious, abbots, superiors of communities, all came to him *as to the oracle of the times.* "I say only what I have seen," said a creditable witness, "I have myself accompanied the Prince of Condti and Messrs. de Urfé and Fénélon, in a visit that they made him, to have his advice upon different affairs."

It was their high idea of his prudence that made the holy Bishop of Geneva and the venerable Mother de Chantal induce him to accept the direction of their first monastery in Paris. It was this same reputation of prudence which made Louis XIII. call him to him at a time when it is most essential to be well counselled. It was the advice which he gave to this dying King, and which extremely edified all the court, that engaged the Queen Mother to place him at the head of her council, and to give him her principal confidence. To make known the prudence of this great man we must follow him, particularly, from his entrance into the house of Gondi until the day of his decease. The

reader may have an idea of this prudence by the wisdom of the regulations which he made on different occasions, the means he adopted for the success of the large number of establishments of which he is the author, the constitutions he has given to his congregation, his conduct during the troubles of the kingdom, and the counsels that his employments or charity obliged him to give. We will relate but two examples.

A Bishop, one of Vincent's friends, protested that he would never change his spouse, that is, his church, for any other, however rich she might be; to signify his fixed resolution on this head, he showed his pastoral ring, and added these words of the Psalmist: "*Oblivioni detur dextera mea, si non meminero tui.*" Some time after, there was talk of giving this prelate a rich archbishopric. It seemed that the solicitations of his family had somewhat shaken his resolution. Vincent, having met him by chance, in order to recall his old promise without seeming to censure him, said, with as much grace as respect: "My Lord, I pray you to remember your ring." The prelate understood the meaning of his words and adhered to his first design.

A learned ecclesiastic, a great preacher and of high birth, paid frequent visits to the Saint, and he had his reason for doing so. Vincent had been charitably told that the clergyman's sentiments were questioned on faith, that he had little sense of religion, or at least behaved like a man who had little. The man of God, wishing to make him enter

into himself, accomplished by circumlocution what he could not directly do without exposing the poor man to make protestations and perhaps false oaths. "Sir," said he, "as you are skillful and a great preacher, I wish some counsel from you. It sometimes happens in our missions, that we find persons who do not believe the truths of our religion—we are at a loss how to persuade them. I beg you to tell me what you think we may best do, on these occasions, to induce them to believe the truths of faith?" This consultation did not please the clergyman, and he replied with some emotion; "Why do you ask me this?" "It is," said Vincent, "because the poor address themselves to the rich to be assisted in their necessities, and as you are well instructed, and we are ignorant, we can do no better than to address ourselves to you to learn what we wish to know." These words calmed the ecclesiastic, and as it was not on the part of the understanding that he failed, he told the Saint that it seemed to him that he would prove the Christian truths, first, by the Scripture, secondly, by the holy fathers, thirdly, by reasoning; fourthly, by the common consent of Catholics of all ages; fifthly, by the testimony of so many martyrs, who had shed their blood in the profession of the same truths; and, in fine, sixthly, by all the miracles God had wrought to confirm them.

When he had finished, Vincent, after having assured him that this method appeared to him good, begged him to reduce it, simply and without study,

to writing, and send it to him. The priest failed not to fulfill this request, and some days after, he himself brought his memoranda to the man of God. "I am greatly consoled," said Vincent, "to see you in such good sentiments,—to justify you, I shall make use of the proofs you have placed in my hands. Perhaps you will hardly believe that certain persons accuse you of false opinions upon the mysteries of faith, but since you know so well how to uphold religion you should live so as not only to be above all suspicion, but in such a way as to edify the public. A man of rank, like you, is more obliged than another to give good example. It is with virtue joined to birth as with a precious stone encased in gold, which is more dazzling than if set in lead." So wise an instruction was not without apparent effect,—at least the priest approved of it, and promised to conform to it, believing that the precautions taken by the holy priest to lead him back to God were unprompted, and the holy priest was quite contented with the seeming good resolutions that he had been instrumental in inspiring him to make. In fact, he so well knew how to time an advice, and to give it in such an appropriate manner, that instead of repelling he attracted confidence. Madam de Chaumont, superioress of the Visitation of Compiègne, said that Vincent had so much prudence and so comprehensive a judgment that nothing escaped his lights, and that in the most difficult, obscure and intricate affairs, he always adopted the best course.

To this testimony we join that of four other persons, John Issaly, secretary to the King, John Baptist Chevalier, counsellor to parliament, Francis de Lamoignon, president of parliament and Claude le Pelletier, minister of State. They deposed in the procès verbal of canonization that Vincent was "a man of magnanimity of mind, skilful in the management of business, as was evident from the number of distinguished persons who consulted him; his goodness and humility made him the same to all with whom he had intercourse; and the greatest minds found him not beneath them when they discussed the most important affairs with him. . . . . Vincent always acted with so much prudence that those to whom justice and reason made him most opposed, could not complain of him." Such was the judgment formed of the servant of God by the greatest heads of the age. These depositions in his favor were supported by thousands of witnesses of inferior rank, but not less deserving of credit.

XXXI.

HIS PURITY.

It can readily be conceived that a man like him, who continually carried about, in his body, the mortification of Jesus Christ, who tyrannized over his flesh by the most austere penance, and of whom it could be said, as of the holy Precursor, that he neither ate nor drank, had attained a great empire over himself; however, the Saint was as vigilant and timid as if he had seen at his side the angel of Satan, that buffeted St. Paul. To escape the snares of this cruel enemy of salvation, he early made the five following rules, from which he never departed.

First, he never made a visit to any woman, not even to the ladies of his Association, but when the glory of God demanded it. Mademoiselle Le Gras, whose virtue he so much esteemed, was, in this, treated like all others. It was an understanding with her from the beginning of the strict and holy union that God formed between them.

Secondly, besides being very precise in the conversations that he was obliged to have with persons of the other sex, he was exceedingly modest. No fixed look nor one savoring of levity,—he kept his

eyes down without constraint or affectation,—appearing less like a man than an angel.

Thirdly, when he was in decrepid old age, indeed, more than an octogenarian, he never remained alone with a woman in his own house or in hers. Everywhere he had a companion whom he commanded never to lose sight of him. If consulted on matters of conscience, his companion removed to a little distance, but was always in sight. The lady of Marshal de Schomberg having come to visit him at St. Lazarus, his attendant in the parlor retired, through respect, and shut the door,—the Saint immediately recalled him, made him sensible of his fault, and forbade him to leave him. He acted thus on several like occasions.

Fourthly, although he often met with persons who needed consolation, still he made use only of the words and maxims of Holy Scripture to allay their bitterness of heart. He avoided those affectionate expressions which cure one evil by inflicting another. "I desire to think," said he once, when consulted about a letter, too affectionate in its tone, "that the person who writes to you thus tenderly means no harm, but it must be acknowledged that the letter might injure an unguarded heart, one less strong than yours. May our Lord be pleased to protect us from the intercourse of such as could weaken our spirit."

Fifthly, as he knew that purity resembles those costly mirrors, whose brightness is tarnished by the lightest breath, he was so circumspect in conversa-

tion that he could not have been more so. Even the word chastity seemed not sufficiently expressive to him, he substituted *purity* for it, which is more comprehensive in its signification. On the alert to put a stop to the disorders of those victims of debauchery, who destroy themselves and destroy many others, he designated them by the title of *poor creatures*, and their depravity as their *misfortune* or their *weakness*. A free expression would make him blush, and, if he could, he instantly reproved those who had been guilty of it in his presence.

It was owing to these rigorous precautions that though calumniated, like his divine Master, on several points, his reputation, under the head of purity, was never tarnished, nor was that of the Divine Savior. On the contrary, Vincent was deservedly looked upon as one of the most zealous advocates of chastity. It is known that in the missions he saved from extreme danger a number of girls and women, on the point of yielding to eager and pressing importunity; that in provinces desolated by war, he clothed and supported a vast number, whom misery and hunger were driving to the last extremities; that Lorraine, where his name should never die, owes to him the honor of its virgins, whom he sent in bands to Paris, and who, by means of the ladies of his Association, found an asylum in the houses of the pious. In fine, that it was under his auspices that the holy and illustrious widows, Madam de Pollalion and Madam Le Gras, his daughters in Jesus Christ, opened their houses to thousands of

young persons who were in extremity, and to whom a day's delay might have cost their innocence. These young persons, though withdrawn from danger, had need, according to him, of being carefully guarded,—he wished them not to be lost sight of, day or night.

The Saint had conceived and would have executed a great design, if death had not snatched him away too soon. In his old years, this great man formed the plan of an hospital for girls and abandoned women, particularly for such as carry on a traffic of the honor and purity of others. He had already held long conferences, on this subject, with persons of piety, and though he saw plainly that such a project would encounter many difficulties in the progress of its execution, yet we doubt not but that his patience and sagacity would have enabled him to surmount them, as he had surmounted so many others. Thus speaks Mr. Abelly, in his history of the servant of God, but that which was then only a contemplated project, amounted to something better a few years after the death of our Saint. His prudence and courage survived in the person of those with whom he was associated in this good project, and it was happily achieved.

If Vincent was so careful for the preservation of purity in externs, what must have been his zeal concerning that of his children. I own, in good faith, that if we knew not the corruption of the human heart, we would suppose him quite ultra in his precautions. A priest, who discharged the functions

of a pastor in Warsaw, asked if, when he visited the sick, he must take a companion. "O, may Jesus preserve you from failing to do so," replied the Saint. "When the Son of God ordained that the apostles should go two and two, He saw the great evils, no doubt, of sending them alone. Now who could wish to depart from a custom which He introduced among his brethren, and which our company has always followed? Experience has taught us, in the case of a number of religious communities, that it is necessary that the doors of infirmaries in monasteries be open, and the curtains of beds drawn, whilst confessors administer the sacraments, and are near the sick, because of abuses that have occurred in these times and places."

This advice may seem strange to many, who believe themselves stronger than an old man, whose past victories and the snows of age did not re-assure; we cannot, however, allow ourselves to suppress lessons by which others may profit. He gave some advice on this subject that may appear still more surprising. Consulted by an upright, simple priest, whether or not he might feel the pulse of a sick woman, to know her situation, and be able to judge the expediency of administering the sacraments, the servant of God replied: "This practice must be absolutely abstained from—the wicked spirit can make use of this occasion to tempt the living and even the dying. The devil, in this last passage, makes an arrow out of every kind of wood to entrap a soul. The strength of the passions may remain, although

that of the body be enfeebled. You should remember the example of that Saint, who had, by the consent of his spouse, lived separated from her, and would not suffer her to touch him in his last illness, exclaiming as loud as he could: 'There is still some fire under the ashes.' In fine, if you wish to know the symptoms of approaching death, ask the physician, or some other person near by, to render you that service, but in no event risk touching either a girl or a woman, under any pretext whatsoever."

The Saint not only wished that permitted actions should be abstained from, but even such as are good and holy, when in the judgment of those who direct us they may be a cause of suspicion, because of all suspicions, just or unjust, there is none so fatal to a priest, to his talents, to his employments, as those which cast a shadow on the purity of his manners—and what he prescribed to ecclesiastics, in this respect, he advised, also, to lay persons. "If there is no harm for persons of different sexes to speak privately, there is always danger of causing thoughts; moreover, the means to preserve purity, is to avoid such occasions as might tarnish it."

However, as he was as judicious as cautious, he would not allow persons to be falsely alarmed at the deluge of foul imaginations which may pass through the mind, and from which the purest souls are not exempt. "You should not be astonished," he wrote to one of his brethren, "at the temptations you may have; it is a trial which God sends you to humble you and make you afraid, but have confidence in

Him. His grace will suffice, provided that you fly the occasions and recognize the need you have of His help. Accustom yourself to place your heart in the sacred wounds of Jesus Christ, always, when assailed with these impure images; it is an inaccessible asylum from the enemy."

XXXII.

HIS GRATITUDE.

Ingratitude, common as it is, outrages the Divinity which is the principle of every blessing, and man, by whom those blessings are disseminated. Vincent had for this unhappy defect all the horror that a well formed heart should have for it. He would have wished, if it were possible, to proportion his gratitude to God, not only to the blessings he had received, but also to those that have been received, and are daily received by all creatures. He thanked Him for the favors He had bestowed since the beginning of the world, and which He continues still to bestow, and particularly for the good works of which His grace had been the principle. The protection that God grants to His Church, to its pastors and to those who labor to multiply its children, the fruits that well ordered communities produce in its bosom, the happy success of retreats,

conferences, seminaries and missions, the prosperity of the arms of his King and all Christian princes, the defeat of the enemies of religion, in a word, every event capable of redounding to the glory of God, and the advantage of the Catholic religion, was the impelling motive of his gratitude. He has been heard to say that we should employ as much time in thanking God for a benefit as we have spent in asking it. "Gratitude," said he, "is a tribute God exacts from His creatures; it was to facilitate the discharge of this duty that He established, in the old law, sacrifices of thanksgiving, and in the new, that of the Eucharist, which should recall to us the wonders He has wrought through love of us. Ingratitude is a sin which dries up the source of grace, —the Son of God complained of it, when, having cured ten lepers, He saw but one retrace his steps to testify his gratitude to his Benefactor."

If from the gratitude that the Saint had towards God we pass to that which he had towards men, we shall see, again, the excellence of his heart. This servant of God, who merited so much esteem, imagined that he deserved none, and hence it was that he was so touched by the smallest services that were rendered him. A child, who showed him the way, a brother who lit his lamp or did still less for him, were sure of his thanks. Whatever the profit they reaped who conversed with him, he still held himself indebted for their visits, —he said to some visitors: "I thank you for not despising old age," to others: "I thank you for having had the patience to bear with me and to hear me."

Had any thing been able to make him forget the austerity of the rules he had prescribed to himself, it would have been the spirit of gratitude, whose weight overwhelmed him. As he was going from Mans to Angers, during the troubles of Paris, he fell into a river, and would have been drowned if a priest, who accompanied him, had not thrown himself into the water to rescue him. This young missioner, who was very fervent then, lost his fervor by degrees. He gave up his vocation, notwithstanding all that Vincent did to retain him. Hardly had he returned home when he found contradictions and crosses, which he had not foreseen. He saw himself overwhelmed with chagrin and lassitude. He then felt the fault he had committed in quitting the state to which God had called him. He determined to return to his father, after the example of the prodigal son. He asked Vincent's forgiveness, and wrote letter upon letter to be received into some one of his houses. Vincent made him no answer. The priest, justly afflicted, redoubled his entreaties, and wrote, without hesitation, that he would be eternally lost if a helping hand were not extended to him. The Saint, distrusting the return of a fickle-minded man, recalled to his mind, in his reply, that patience which had been exercised towards him, the little attention he had paid to it, and the just reason they had to fear that he would soon repent, even of his repentance, and concluded that he ought not to be again received. A reply, so severe, was a thunderbolt to the ecclesiastic—he made

a last effort. He attacked Vincent at his most accessible point,—on the score of gratitude. "Sir," he wrote, "I once saved the life of your body, save now the life of my soul." On reading these words the heart of the holy man was moved. The opportunity of exercising a precious virtue, joined to the perseverance of the suppliant, determined him: "Come, Sir," he replied, "you will be received with open arms." At the moment of setting out this ecclesiastic was taken ill, and his recovery proved beyond the power of skill. He was happy, however, in having done all that depended on him to repair his fault, and at having listened to the remorse which is generally contemned during life, and which still more generally leads to despair at the hour of death!

We have elsewhere seen that the Saint returned to his benefactors, in their hour of need, what they had given him in their time of abundance—we must add here that when propriety would not permit him to do that, he tried to supply for it by a liberality which sometimes went beyond his means. A lord, whose name is known throughout Europe, and who, in the congregation, was considered as one of its founders, had the misfortune to fall into disgrace with his prince, and was reduced to seek an asylum in a distant country. Vincent knew that he was in want of many things, and, although then there was much to suffer in France, he borrowed three hundred pistoles to help him. Notwithstanding his entreaties, this sum was not accepted, because he to

whom it was offered was not ignorant of the sad state of the affairs of St. Lazarus. Some missionaries, who were in the same place where this lord had taken refuge, bestowed on him all the care and good offices that they could,—this charity cost them dearly, and they suffered little less, if not more, than he did in whose favor they exercised it. Vincent was informed of this: "What is pleasing to God happens," said he, "for it is better to lose all than to lose the virtue of gratitude."

These are not the only proofs of gratitude given by the Saint. He once presented two thousand francs to a man who was in need, and who had shown some favor to one of his houses. He took special care of a poor woman who had served two patients, under contagious diseases, at St. Lazarus, about the time when the missionaries were established there,—he provided for her support, and paid her rent for thirty years. He more than once accepted burdensome foundations, from which he drew little profit, save that of being grateful to those who seemed to wish him well, In fine, to extend gratitude as far as possible, he looked upon, and wished each one of his brethren to look upon, as done to himself what was done to one of their number. Therefore, upon the news that the religious of Bar had given honorable burial to one of his priests, who had died in their house, he gave a spiritual conference to his community on the obligation of gratitude, to induce his children to pray to God for

them, and for grace and opportunity to acknowledge this benefit. Thus did this holy man evince his eminent spirit of gratitude!

XXXIII.

HIS RULE.

It was more than thirty years since the congregation of the mission had been established, and it had, as yet, no rule. His brethren had, till then, found in him a living rule, and to do well they had but to observe their model, but this model could not abide a much longer time with them. It was requisite to prevent, by clear and precise regulations, even the shadow of those doubts to which the restlessness of the human mind, otherwise, would not have failed to give birth in the sequel. Vincent, notwithstanding his continued occupation, thought of it every day. He took the advice of the most learned canonists of Rome, of the best theologians of the Sorbonne and of the most skillful lawyers of parliament. Although three or four hours would suffice to read his rules all over, they contain so beautiful a summary of the Gospel, such wise maxims, means so proportioned to the end, such sure ways to arrive at Christian and sarcedotal perfection, such efficacious remedies against the corruption of the age, such prudent advice for the sanctification of the

people, that it is easy to perceive that God is in them, and that it was in the light of His Holy Spirit that Vincent drew up all that he has set forth in them.

The congregation of the mission proposes, as much as it can, to take Jesus Christ for a model,—it should, like that Divine Savior, both do and teach labor for its own perfection, and announce the Gospel to the country poor. Being composed of ecclesiastics and persons not in orders, the first are to go from village to village to preach, confess, settle lawsuits, put an end to differences, govern seminaries, give retreats, and apply to like functions; the second, to discharge the office of Martha, and draw down by their prayers the blessing of God upon themselves and upon the labors of others.

To accomplish this end, the saintly founder wished that his children should be clothed with the spirit of Jesus Christ, and that they attach themselves to the maxims which He has traced for us in the Gospel; to His poverty, purity, obedience, charity, modesty, to His conduct in the missions which He gave, and in the duties that He discharged toward the people, His manner of living, of acting, of treating with the neighbor, and His exercises of piety. It was to these ten points that Vincent reduced the rules of his congregation. He exacted, before all things, that his missionaries should always conduct themselves according to the rules that the Son of God has given us, and never according to those of the world. He required that they should prefer the

goods of the soul to those of the body; the glory of God to the vanities of the times; poverty, infamy, torments, and even death, to all that could separate them from the charity of Jesus Christ. That they should apply themselves to do in everything the will of God, and to do this, that they should choose what is most repugnant to nature, and receive good and evil from the Hand of God with equal gratitude, and should join the simplicity of the dove to the prudence of the serpent.

After some other like maxims upon the necessity of renouncing one's own judgment and what could flatter the senses; to struggle against a badly-regulated tenderness for parents; not to attach themselves to employments, persons or places; to avoid singularity in the way of living, in habits, in teaching, preaching and directing; the holy priest exhorted his children at the same time to seek to acquire simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification, and zeal for the salvation of souls. He wished that these five virtues should be as the seal of his congregation, and that every action should bear their impress. To these five virtues he joined three others, of which the Son of God made use to combat the demon and overthrow his empire—a poverty that extended to not having even a stone whereon to rest His Head, perfect purity which even envy has never attacked, that obedience which made Him die upon the Cross.

Although his missionaries, forming only a secular body, cannot be deprived of their rights to

property, he required them to live as if they possessed nothing. Everything was to be poor in their houses, table, bed, apartments and furniture. There was to be nothing curious, nothing superfluous. The desire to have ecclesiastical property he treated as a dangerous temptation. Upon chastity, inasmuch as many precautions are the more necessary to missionaries, since they are exposed by their state to so many occasions capable of injuring it, he prescribed the most severe regulations, as we have seen in Chapter XXXI. Concerning obedience, the Saint carried his views very far,—the Pope, bishops, superiors of the congregation, of whatever rank they be, should expect a prompt and reasonable docility. At the first sound calling to an exercise, a letter must be left unfinished. The pious custom of asking nothing and refusing nothing is less a counsel than an inviolable law.

A man so full of charity did not overlook the sick. Domestics, strangers, and especially the poor of the missions, must be visited, consoled, comforted as regards soul and body. If the infirmarian had his rule, the patient had his,—virtue should increase in infirmity. The bed of pain upon which the patient lies is a pulpit from which he should preach patience, resignation, and perfect obedience to all those who have the care of him.

These rules are followed by others which relate to their manner of living, whether at home with the brethren or with strangers. They should respect the first as true friends; have neither private friend-

ships nor animosities; entertain themselves by conversing on good things; speak evil of no one, still less of other communities; keep strict silence at the times fixed, that is, during the entire day, except about two hours.

As regards externs, they will see them only so much as obedience or necessity requires. As persons engaged in the service of God should not engage in secular affairs, Vincent did not wish his brethren to take part in law suits, to execute wills, or to arrange marriages. He deemed it not out of place for them to meddle in affairs of piety, but always within the bounds of subordination.

Although all that has been said above is nothing more than what the holy canons make binding on ecclesiastics not living in community, the servant of God knew human weakness too well to suppose that without a special grace it would be able to support itself long in a way, which, in itself, is so painful to nature,—to obtain this grace, Vincent prescribed a number of exercises of piety, all proper to draw down the spirit that gives life and preserves it. He afterwards enters into some details upon the manner in which his missionaries should preach. In their discourses they must never employ those soft and affected expressions, those emphatic thoughts, those vain subtleties, which were never used by our Savior, and which His first disciples held in abhorrence. Vincent wished in their discourses no novel ideas, singular ways, vain curiosities. Ambition and jealousy were enormous passions, which, in his

eyes, should be always guarded against. Each one of the brethren should wish, with Moses, that all were prophets; each should participate, by joy at their success, in the good done by other communities, and should rejoice to be thought little of, whilst other religious are loaded with honor and glory.

What seems to me most remarkable in the rules of the holy Founder of the mission, is that, although written with simplicity, they have in the original an impress of light and unction to which a summary cannot attain. A great prelate, to whom the Saint had given the rules, always carried them about his person, looking upon them as a most beautiful abridgment of the Gospel. This is the idea that should be entertained of them, and it is, in truth, the opinion of all true missionaries. To make known to them with what exactitude these rules should be observed, the Saint, before distributing them, gave a discourse to the community, which relates closely to the epistle that serves as a preface to the rules. The substance of both is that although nearly thirty-three years had elapsed since the establishment of the congregation, he had not yet given them a written rule, inasmuch as he had wished them to imitate the Son of God, who began to do before He taught, and because all precipitation of this kind was attended with many inconveniences; besides, he had wished to know by long experience what would suit and what would not suit,—that in giving the rules a little later, it was a consolation that nothing was prescribed in them to which the company had not been a long time accustomed.

Vincent concluded, in this same discourse, that the rules which he gave them were the work of Him from whom comes every good, and without whom we are not able to have a good thought. He made it evident that the congregation and his constitutions have the same source,—that all had been effected, in a certain sense, without his participation,—that he had never thought of his rules, of the company, nor even of the word *mission*. "It is God," said he, "who has done all that—man has had no part in it. . . . Mr. Portail has, as well as me, seen the origin of the little company; he can tell you that we thought of nothing less than of what we to-day witness. Everything has been done by itself in regular succession. The number joining us increased, each one labored to acquire virtue, good practices were introduced to provide for living together. These practices have always been observed, and are observed to-day, by the grace of God. In fine, it has been judged proper to reduce them to writing, and to propose them to you as rules of life. What remains to me, gentlemen, then, but to imitate Moses, who, after having given the law of God to the people, promised to all who should observe it all kinds of benedictions, in their bodies, in their souls, in their goods, and in every way. We ought also to hope from the goodness of God all kinds of graces for those who faithfully observe the rules that He has given us. I trust that the fidelity with which you have till now observed them, and your patience in awaiting them for so long a time, will obtain of

God for you strength to observe them still more perfectly in future."

After this discourse, which Vincent pronounced with so much humility and sweetness, that he infused the sentiments of his heart into the hearts of his auditors, he approached the priests and gave to each one a copy of the constitution and his blessing, which, through devotion, were received kneeling. Thus finished this day, which the man of God might have looked upon as the most beautiful of his life. However strong his desire to be dissolved and to be with Jesus Christ, he had always feared to be snatched away before his congregation had a form of government from which it could not deviate. If his frequent illnesses made him more than once incur the risk of leaving his work imperfect, it was because it was his principle to strive for the better when not absolutely obliged to be contented with what was good.

XXXIV.

HIS RESPECT FOR THE POPE, BISHOPS, AND PASTORS.

Vincent loved and honored the ecclesiastical state in all its degrees. He respected, in the person of the chief pastor, Jesus Christ, whose place he holds on earth. When the Holy See was vacant, he ceased not to pray himself and to have others pray to God, that He would deign to place over His flock a man according to His own heart. As he fulfilled a long course, he saw during his life twelve different popes, in rather rapid succession, upon the chair of St. Peter. He followed the Roman discipline as far as he could. It was through the obedience that he paid ecclesiastical authority that he accepted the charge of the superior generalship of his congregation, imposed upon him by Urban VIII. in the same bull in which he approved of the new institute. From the same principle, when later he was asked, in the name of the Holy See, to send laborers into infidel countries, he sent them at the first intimation.

In regard to bishops, nothing was impossible to him when he acted in obedience to them, and although they are not all without defects, he was

accustomed to honor, in their persons, the power and majesty of Him whose place they hold, and saw nothing in them that was reprehensible. His zeal for their interests was most clearly manifested in the council of conscience. He needed not solicitations nor prayers to move him to aid them—he was more active in furthering their interest than those of his own brethren. His influence was employed for them—and he never wearied recommending them to the Queen, the Cardinal Minister, the Chancellor, and the most influential of the magistrates. As almost all the bishops of his time owed their dignity to him, they looked upon him as their father. He induced the clergy and people to pay to their sacred character due honor, and he received them into his house as angels and ambassadors of the living God. Summer had no heats, winter no frosts that could prevent him from setting out at their first command. In fine, he was, as far as concerned them, that servant who goes and comes as he is commanded. The advice he gave either to those who asked it, and it was often asked, or to those who did not ask it, which sometimes occurred, was so full of wisdom and submission that it was impossible to be offended by it. The letters of this holy priest, preserved by Mr. Abelly, are an eternal monument of the respect which he had for the episcopal order. Whatever conduct he may have observed with regard to bishops, the law of the most inviolable respect was a point that his eyes never lost sight of.

The purity of the sentiments that the man of God had for the episcopacy was manifested by those which he entertained for the subordinate clergy. It was his maxim to do good to every one and evil to no one, but when there was question of the ministers of the Son of God he went still farther. Whoever was clothed with the sacred character, whoever bore any external mark of the clerical order, was sure of finding favorable access to him, a resource in his trials, a hand always ready to dry his tears. He placed those worthy to perform certain duties in suitable positions, and would not permit his brethren to say evil of those of whom they could say nothing good. It was his counsel, that the pulpit of truth should thunder against the disorders, not of the pastor, who thereby would be embittered but not converted, but against the people, as a mass, who feel less the severity of the blow, since it falls on many. A missionary, who had more zeal than discretion, failed in this respect one day,—the Saint traveled six leagues to beg pardon of some ecclesiastics whom the preacher had not treated with sufficient consideration.

It was not that Vincent, become a new Heli, dissembled when he ought to speak. The irregularities of a pastor afflicted him more in one sense than those of the rest of his parish, but he had learned from St. Francis de Sales that ecclesiastical delicacy of feeling requires great respect, and that, generally speaking, ways of meekness are to be first tried. And have they not often succeeded, and has not the

charity that was joined to the unction of his words made many conquests? He withdrew thus from proximate occasions to evil those that were ensnared, provided for their maintenance, extended to them hospitality or obtained it for them, until they were able to resume some of their duties, or to subsist without them. He rescued a priest from a bad state, sent to Rome to obtain his release from censures, supported him until he received it, and placed him where he could subsist all the rest of his days. To obtain a hearing, neither foreign protection nor multiplied visits were necessary. The great lover of the priesthood of Jesus Christ found, in the sacerdotal character alone, sufficient to move him. A strange invalid priest asked some help of him,—Vincent received him with goodness, lodged and fed him, gave him suitable medicines and kept him till he had recovered his health. Another, who was making his retreat at St. Lazarus, fell sick,—the Saint lavished every imaginable care on him. The illness was of long continuance, but charity lasted still longer. When the patient had recovered, Vincent gave him a soutan, a breviary, several other articles, and ten crowns for his immediate necessities. A third, obliged to make a journey, without having the necessary means to defray the expense, addressed himself to the servant of God,—this "man of mercy" furnished him with all necessaries, even to boots, and with twenty crowns. A fourth, asked hospitality, and it was granted, but he made a bad return to his benefactor, for, on taking his

leave, he carried away a soutan and long mantle. Some one wished to pursue him, but Vincent said: "It must be that what he took was much needed by him, after the sad state in which he came to us. If, indeed, he is to be pursued, let it not be to demand what he has taken, but to carry him what he needs." A pastor of Touraine had a law suit at Paris, which he was obliged to carry on for the honor of his name, unjustly aspersed. He wrote to the holy priest that, as he could neither leave his parish, nor maintain an attorney in the capital, he prayed Vincent to have pity on him. "Send here," Vincent wrote in reply, "such a person as pleases you, and I will defray the expense." The law suit continued for more than a year, and he lodged and fed the defendant of the good pastor, who gained his cause.

His priestly charity never cooled, and, although in ornaments, linens, sacred vessels, vestments, books and reparations to Churches, he had spent more than a million, the holy man never thought that he had done enough. There were few priests in the Kingdom that rendered him not that justice of appreciation which he refused to himself. If Joseph was looked upon as the savior of Egypt, Vincent was looked upon as the savior of priests and pastors. This was so widely known, that when on account of the misfortunes of the times, a large crowd of them came to Paris, they went straight to St. Lazarus. Those who could not repair thither, wrote to him from their distant provinces. His

memory was in benediction, and his praises resounded everywhere. A missionary, passing by Champagne, met in the town the pastor of the place, who asked who he was. "I am a missionary," said the traveller. Instantly, the pastor threw himself on his neck, tenderly embraced him, conducted him into his house, and there related to him the great spiritual and corporal services that the Saint had lavished on all in the country,—he added, showing the soutan that he had on: "*Et hâc me veste contexit,*" words which were said to Saint Martin of the poor that he had clothed, and more than two thousand priests could have used the same to St. Vincent.

XXXV.

HIS SPIRITUAL RETREATS.

No one had even undertaken anything in this way like that which Vincent accomplished. The greatest Saints of the last centuries had lamented the corruption that reigned over the face of Christendom. They exhorted the faithful to weigh all their actions in the balance of truth, and to ponder deeply eternal years, which are rapidly advancing, but it was reserved to our Saint to afford them new facilities for this, and to take from the lower class, that is, the greater number, those real or imaginary pretexts by which

they veil their negligence and insensibility. To effect this it is not only necessary to give them directors able to touch them by their discourses, and to lead them effectively to the tribunal of penance, but also, to spare them expense. However great their expenses may be, they count them as nothing as long as they minister to their pleasures, while however moderate they may be, they consider them as excessive when there is question only of their eternal salvation. This consideration made Vincent share his house, moveables, everything with such as wished to avail themselves of his hospitality, to be reconciled to God. Like the father of the family, spoken of in the Gospel, he in a manner forced both good and bad to sit down at his table. In recompense, he required that those who were already just should become still more just, and that those who were not, should endeavor to become so.

The fame of such disinterested conduct spread throughout Paris and the provinces. In a few months the house of St. Lazarus was more frequented than it had been for a century. The Saint himself compared it to Noah's ark, wherein all kinds of animals, both great and small, were well received. It was, indeed, a singular spectacle to see, in the same refectory, lords of the first rank, and people of the lowest condition, laymen and clerics, magistrates and simple workmen, masters and servants; in fine, old men who came to bewail the past, and young men, to guard against the dangers of the future.

To sustain an enterprise of this nature, and to secure every possible good from it, required great courage and many lights. The man of God, who never commenced anything without having examined at leisure whether he would have wherewith to finish, adopted measures which, in the order of grace, insured an almost infallible success. He besought of God, both for himself and for his brethren, that spirit of counsel, unction and strength necessary to draw forth such as are buried in the tomb of sin. As regards the enormous expenditures needed to carry on his good work, he could do no better than to cast himself, without reserve, into the arms of Providence.

Such was the general plan formed by Vincent. To make this plan useful to those who made the retreats, and to insure that the giving of retreats should be continued, from age to age, down to his last successors, he sought to make known to both those who made the retreats and those who conducted them, the value of the grace God had placed in their hands. He represented to the *exercitans*, as he called those who made the spiritual exercises, that the sole end of a retreat is to destroy the reign of sin, to reform the entire man, to renew the interior, to open their eyes on the peculiar duties of their state and upon their personal obligations; in fine, to ground them solidly in a true charity, which unites the heart and all the powers of the soul to God, so that they can exclaim, with truth, with the apostle: "I live, no, not I, but Christ liveth in me."

To omit nothing that might conduce to the full success of the retreats, the servant of God required that those to whom he entrusted the conducting of them, should take for the subject of their discourses not such topics as are calculated to amuse the mind and recreate the imagination, but the principal truths of salvation; in a word, those that a Christian never forgets without becoming more corrupt, and which he can scarcely reach without becoming better. Thus, the end for which God has created us, the graces that we have received from Him, the great lessons which He has given us in Jesus Christ His Son, the resources which He has prepared for us in the sacraments, the dispositions which are necessary to approach them, a horror of sin, the fatal consequences entailed by it, the vanity of the world and its opinions, the illusions of our own hearts, the temptations of the flesh, the malice and artifices of the old serpent, the shortness of life, the uncertainty of the moment of death, the fearful judgments of God, a blessed or miserable eternity; these truths and others like them, were then, and are now, the usual subject of the discourses of those who conduct the retreats, and of meditation for those who perform the exercises. Thus they are prepared to examine their consciences carefully, to make good general confessions, or, if they have already made satisfactory ones, to supply by an exact review everything that was defective since; to frame a rule of life from which they will never deviate unless obliged to do so; and, above all, to

form firm resolutions to avoid evil and to do good. The Saint, fearing that after his death the priests of his congregation, overwhelmed with labor, and wearied at the expenses of so many gratuitous retreats, would by degrees relent, endeavored to guard them against this kind of temptation. He represented to them that their house was formerly an asylum for lepers, and that there was not one received there who was not cured. That, at present, persons were there received who were attacked with a leprosy much more dangerous than that of the body, or, rather, persons already dead, and that, by the mercy of God, a great number received health and life; that our Lord effected there every day in favor of sinners what He had effected for Lazarus, since He drew them forth from the tomb of sin, and that they, as missionaries, had the honor of being made His instruments in this great work. "Ah!" he exclaimed, "what a subject of confusion if this place, which is now a salutary pool wherein so many come to be cleansed, should one day, through the relaxation and indolence of its inmates, become a stagnant cistern! Beg God, gentlemen, that this misfortune may not happen. Pray the Holy Virgin that she may, through her intercession and her desire for the conversion of sinners, avert it from us. Let us beseech that great friend of the Son of God, St. Lazarus, that he would be pleased to be always the protector of this house, and that he would obtain for its inmates the grace of perseverance in the good work it has commenced."

Vincent reminded his missionaries from time to time of those good effects of retreats, which they had themselves witnessed. It was thus that he animated them to make no account either of difficulty or expense. He set an example in this respect, that was more powerful than his words. He increased the number of *exercitans*,—the older he grew, unlike most old persons, the more prodigal he became of expenditures for holy ends. His charity had no bounds, and at last it went so far that he received as many to make the spiritual exercises as he possibly could. From the registry kept during the last twenty-five years of his life we find that nearly twenty thousand persons made a retreat in his house, that is to say, nearly eight hundred a year. It is true that some paid their expenses, either wholly or in part, but the majority paid nothing at all, either because their small fortune did not allow it, or because they falsely imagined, then, as well as now, that the retreats at St. Lazarus had a settled foundation or endowment, and that their reception was less a duty of charity than an obligation of justice.

It sometimes happens that virtuous persons do not always think alike, and some were found among the missionaries that thought the Saint's charity was carried to excess. "At the rate you are going on," said the Brother Procurator, one day, "the house will go down,—you receive too many *exercitans*." The holy man replied: "Brother, they wish to save their souls." Another represented that

in this multitude of *exercitans* there were several who would not profit by the exercises, and that some came rather for food for their bodies than for their souls, but this worthy imitator of the charity of Jesus Christ replied that, viewed with the eye of faith and religion, it was a great blessing that a part of the *exercitans* drew the fruit they ought from the retreats, and that to feed a man who was in need was always an alms very acceptable to God. That, if not to be deceived by those whose virtues were less pure, they made it too difficult to receive those that presented themselves, they would repulse some upon whom the Holy Spirit had designs of mercy, and that, in fine, by seeking to penetrate the motives which actuated them, they would check in many, who wished to give themselves to God, the first fruits of the Spirit that called them. He explained his views with so much precision, that it was easy to perceive not only that his decision was already taken but that he was led on by a supernatural impulse. "If we had," said he, "thirty years to subsist, and that by receiving those who come to make retreats we could not to subsist more than fifteen years, we ought not, with this prospect, to be deterred from receiving them. It is true the expense is great, but it could not be applied to a better cause, and if the house should become embarrassed on this account, God will know well how to relieve it, as he gives us reason to hope in His providence."

Such were the principles of the Saint concerning an

establishment which he believed suited to contribute to the glory of God and the sanctification of his neighbor. One day it was thought that his zeal was going to be confined to narrower limits,—it had been rather forcibly represented to him that the exigencies of the house were extreme. Not to withstand seemingly just remonstrances, he took upon himself to select the exercitans, but when there was question of admitting some and rejecting others his heart was moved—he could not refuse any one. More were received that day than customary—he was finally notified that there were no more vacant apartments. "In that case, give mine," he replied.

If it cost our Saint much to sustain so onerous a work, we must allow that even during his life he was recompensed a hundred fold. When the houses of his congregation were multiplied, those that were able afforded, by his order, the same facilities for retreats as the houses of St. Lazarus in Paris. He saw himself that these spiritual retreats produced inexpressible blessings everywhere. A prodigious number of letters were received, congratulating him on the benediction God imparted to his zeal—priests, pastors, bishops, cardinals, all returned a thousand thanks to him for facilitating a practice which sanctifies pastors and people every day. A taste for the retreats at St. Lazarus passed into a great number of dioceses. Some prelates, who, as private individuals, had been put under Vincent's direction, having been sanctified by the spiritual exercises,

undertook to sanctify their priests by the same means. One of these wrote to the servant of God that he had thirty priests in his episcopal mansion making the retreat with much fruit.

An Archbishop took advantage of the labors of a missionary, also, to change in the same way, the face of his diocese. The word retreat was enough to alarm ecclesiastics a long time given up to dissipation. Some complained as of an insupportable torture, others murmured as of an ill-timed novelty, the most reasonable were discontented. So that among forty, perhaps there was not one who would not have been very glad to be dispensed. Grace soon triumphed over these bad dispositions—in less than three days it dispersed the clouds that the seducer wished to spread over the work of God. The most aged, that is, those hardest to be shaken, flew to all the exercises—sighs were heard, and tears were seen to flow. All made confessions more or less general. They were grieved on arriving at the end of the exercises—the ten days of retreat had passed too rapidly, and they suffered more on leaving than they did on entering. Such of their false friends as had sought to deter them were surprised to find them new men. They recognized, in spite of themselves, the work of the Hand of the Most High, and they asked to make a retreat also. The prelate opened another,—this time grace was still more effective, and some striking conversions took place. The majority of the *exercitans* acknowledged that until then they had

not known the eminence of the sacerdotal dignity; that had they considered it in its proper light, they would not have so lightly engaged in its duties, and that they would repair as far as they could whatever was defective concerning their calling.

It was not only in this kingdom that God blessed the retreats—His Hand was with the missionaries in Italy as well as in France. Cardinal Durazzo, whose zeal reflected honor on the Roman people, had no sooner established the priests of the mission at Genoa, of which he was Archbishop, than he tried if they would effect as much good for the ecclesiastics as they had for the people of his diocese. He therefore invited the pastors in whose parishes the missionaries had labored to repair to the capital city. The greater part obeyed with pleasure, and God recompensed their docility. The retreat effected some conversions, which were to be considered as doubly miraculous, since a father of the Church supposed that a bad priest is very rarely converted. Several, for their own greater confusion, acknowledged publicly that they had only entered on the retreat to make it a matter of derision, that interest and hypocrisy had solely influenced them, that they had said all they could that was evil against the missions. They shed bitter tears, they humbled themselves before all as much as could be desired. Those barren fig-trees, which had seemed cursed forevermore, appeared such no more, and those who compared themselves with themselves discerned that God had manifested mercy to

them. Furthermore, these public confessions were not of rare occurrence in the retreats of Genoa. The spirit of humility and compunction was so dominant there that it was difficult to restrain its sallies. "We are here in the valley of Josaphat," said one of those gentlemen, on that occasion, "each one confesses his own miseries." Blessed are those who, by this anticipated confusion, put themselves in a state to avoid that of the day of the Lord. Cardinal Durazzo, who could scarcely believe what he saw with his own eyes, could not restrain his tears. He blessed the first author of these blessings and all who were instruments of them.

It was the sight of so many blessings that rendered the Saint so firm in not suffering his house to relent concerning the retreats, as long as it was possible to support the expense. What he so much apprehended has not yet happened, for now, as during his life, every week a goodly number of *exercitans* are received gratuitously. The misfortunes of the times have deranged nothing in the carrying on of this good work—these gentlemen are the first and best served. They are lodged more comfortably than they were in the time of Vincent. Mr. Almeras, his worthy successor, when he raised the new building over the ruins of the old, had a grand and spacious suite of rooms, seventy-five in number, constructed for them, and when all these are not sufficient, for sometimes there are more than one hundred and twenty persons at a time, the missionaries camp down wherever they

can, and count not what they may suffer, provided the *exercitans* do not suffer. We need not dwell longer on what all Paris bears witness to—what we have said would be more than enough to merit for the man of God the greatest encomiums if we lived in times when gratitude was proportioned to benefits.

XXXVI.

HIS SEMINARIES.

The Saint always pursued his first two projects —the reform of the clergy, and the instruction of the country people. What he had hitherto done in favor of such as were aspiring to Holy Orders, did not seem enough to him, and he was contented only because he could not do better. He judged, with reason, that if they could early train ecclesiastics to the virtues of their state, the Church would find, one day, in these young, well-cultivated plants, more secure resources against license and dissoluteness. With this view, he established a seminary in the college of the Bons-Enfans. He followed the plan of the Council of Trent, and received a number of clerics, aged twelve and fourteen years, to whom the missionaries taught the chant, the ceremonies, and still more, the gravity, detachment from the world and all the virtues

proper to the holy ministry, but he recognized in the sequel, that this project, beautiful as it was, would be very difficult of execution. It yields to the Church, in its most pressing needs, but tardy fruits. Sometimes she even sees herself deprived of them, when she thought herself on the eve of enjoying them, because these young men, when older, took part with or became enamored of the world, and left the ecclesiastical state. This it was that induced our Saint, without abandoning his enterprise, to add something to it by establishing seminaries on the same footing that they are on now.

The establishments already made or contemplated, caused, in this recently-formed congregation, vacancies that it would have been difficult to fill, had not some necessary precautions been taken. The best was to form a nursery of ecclesiastics, who, after having been trained and tried, during several years, were fitted to perpetuate and multiply the blessings that their predecessors had to dispense. Vincent, therefore, founded his primary seminary, into which not only priests already trained to the functions of the ministry were received, as heretofore, but also young persons, less advanced, and who, consequently, needed longer cultivation. An employment of such importance needed an experienced director, meek but not yielding, firm but not harsh, vigilant but not affected, suited to direct the tottering steps of man

without departing from rule, and who, above all, possessed the great art of discerning spirits. The holy man found all these qualities in the person of John de la Salle, one of the first three priests that had joined him to labor on the country missions. He imposed upon him the care of this young and precious militia, destined, one day, to combat for the salvation of men.

It was on the spirit of abnegation and labor that Vincent wished every thing to be brought to bear in all the exercises of the neophytes. With this view, then as well as now, they were accustomed to a closely laborious life. To rise at exactly four o'clock in the morning, at all seasons; to make meditation twice every day; to nourish their souls by reading good books; to pass no day without learning something from the New Testament; to cleanse their consciences by frequent confessions; to fortify themselves by Holy Communion; to examine every month, by a little retreat, the progress made in virtue or, rather, what they had failed to make; to examine, even more closely, in two long and strict retreats, semi-annually; to be instructed in the virtues suited to their state, in the grounds of faith and rules of discipline, by frequent conferences upon piety, the Holy Scriptures, and the teachings of the Council of Trent; such was the rule of life for these aspirants to the priesthood, and for the others. Afterwards, they passed on to their studies, either to philosophy, if they had not yet mastered

it, or to theology, if ready to enter on its study. They did not espouse sentiments of any particular school: "*Amicus Plato, amicus Aristoteles, sed magis amica veritas.*" The great rule is to receive as true what the Church receives, and to reject all that she judges proper to reject. But if the Saint allowed his brethren to acquire the highest sciences, his humility, which nothing escaped, made him take measures to secure them from self-conceit and vanity, the too frequent accompaniments of talents and science. He never allowed his brethren to publish anything, and even refused permission for one of his priests to publish a Syriac version of the Scripture, which the learned men of Rome had asked repeatedly for. When he directed seminaries, he forbade his brethren to dictate manuscripts. He proved, by a solid written argument, that they ought, with the approbation of bishops, to be contented with explaining a printed author, remarking wherever he may have departed from the truth. He was always sorry when his brethren assisted at public theses, in the university, or elsewhere, if they did not look upon themselves as the last, and much more so if they wished to be first.

To preserve the great good that Vincent de Paul had done in the different dioceses where he had given missions, the bishops prudently judged that the best means to succeed, was to form good ecclesiastics, whilst they labored to sanctify the people. The matter of sanctifying the people presented no

difficulty, they had but to give missions and it was effected. The point which regarded the training up of priests, and, consequently, the erection of seminaries, was more difficult of adjustment. Their embarrassment was to know if, in the founding of large seminaries, they should follow the plan of the Council of Trent, and admit only young boys, who, being preserved in holy retirement from the corruption of the age, would early imbibe the milk of virtue and ecclesiastical science, or, if they should admit only clerics, of about twenty years, who having already consulted God, and having attained to a certain maturity, were able to choose a state of life, hence seemed to afford room for more assured and prompt hopes. They weighed the reasons for and against; Vincent told them that the provincial seminaries, in which a great effort had been made to begin to train up ecclesiastics from childhood, had not succeeded, that those of Bordeaux and Agen were deserted, that the Archbishop of Rouen, during twenty years, had not derived six priests out of the large number of young men whom he had educated with every possible precaution; that the majority had returned to the world, and on leaving had said that they had assumed the ecclesiastical garb at too early an age for reflection.

The bishops were struck with these reasons, which were founded on experience; since then, none but clerics, who have completed their rhetoric

and philosophy, have been received into any of the seminaries of the Kingdom. The man of God established a seminary on this footing at the College des Bons-Enfans, but his respect for the Council of Trent would not allow him to give up the one that he had formed according to the plan of that holy assembly. He transferred the students into one house, which is at the extremity of the enclosure of St. Lazarus, and named it the seminary of St. Charles. The priests of the mission there trained to virtue and *belles-lettres*, a number of young persons who manifested an inclination for the ecclesiastical state, and who, subsequently, discharged worthily the first employments. Thus did they there join the exercises of regular colleges to the exercises of piety, and the celebrated Carborand de la Fosse often had Christian tragedies represented there, whose spirit and elevation merited for him the applause of all the connoisseurs of Paris. Santeuil always looked upon him as his rival, and sometimes as his master.

As soon as the Saint saw that the bishops were determined to erect these large seminaries, he devised means of making them academies of holiness and learning. He reduced their attainments to three heads,—solid piety, plentitude of the sacerdotal spirit, and that kind of practical science which embraces not only dogmas but morals. He ordained that conferences should be given twice a week; time was arranged for the chant and cere-

monies, and for learning the manner of conducting them, of administering the sacraments, giving sermons, and teaching catechism; the explanations of theology were to be clear and precise, and were never to be omitted; in fine, they should study everything profoundly that could conduce to the good governing of the people. Vincent was persuaded that the finest geniuses are not always those that train youth the best—at least, that they do not know what is sometimes as difficult: viz., how to adapt themselves to their pupils. He wrote, in terms apparently singular, but full of sense, to one of his priests, who had great talents: "We recall you, dear Sir, and desire that you should no longer teach, because you are too skillful." This professor, who had much erudition, in the wish to teach everything to his scholars, taught them nothing. It was found, on examining them before the Bishop, that they had improved more under his colleague whose talents were inferior.

It is true, that Vincent considered science an essential part, because an ignorant priest is blind and leads others to the precipice, but he preferred piety, and he held it as a principle that in order to draw fruit from seminary training, those who were received should remain there some time. "Alas!" said he, "the vilest business requires an apprenticeship of several years, and yet, for men who have to be cured of their bad habits, it is thought five or six months are enough to empty

their hearts of all that savors of an ill regulated affection for creatures, and to advance in knowledge and love of the great Master, to whose service they desire to consecrate themselves." He thought that none of those who aspire to Holy Orders should be exempted from the seminary, not even the most virtuous and talented. What, then, would he have said if he had seen those dispensed, in whose case birth and heritage take the precedence, and, indeed, the place of merit? The reason that the servant of God assigned for his opinion was, that ecclesiastics, who were already virtuous and capable, would increase in science and virtue in a good seminary; that they serve the others much, because the weak are animated by the example of the strong, and, in fine, when the rule is general, a bishop is secure from importunities, because no one thinks of an exemption never granted to any one, and which, besides, would be prejudicial to whoever should obtain it.

As the missionaries were surprised to see their duties multiplying, and feared that by dividing their energies they would effect less good in missions, which seemed to be their principal object, this wise superior represented to them that the company had no other duties than those that God had imposed upon it by the ministry of the pastors of His Church; that the designs of the father of the family were developed progressively; that the first members of the congregation had been

first occupied only with their salvation, and with that of the country people, that afterwards, they had been designated to give the spiritual exercises to seminarians before ordination, that the same authority had employed them to direct seminaries, and that, consequently, they ought to promise themselves the same success, by the mercy of God, if they knew how to appreciate the grace offered them as much as it deserved.

Hence, the Saint inferred that a missionary would be wrong in saying that he did not intend to shut himself up in a city to train clerics, but rather to traverse towns and villages to convert sinners. "Truly," said he, "the instruction of the poor is very important, but the instruction of ecclesiastics is still more important, for if they are ignorant, the people must be so also. We must labor in the missions, but we must not neglect the seminaries, since both one and the other are nearly equally necessary in the Institute of the Congregation, for the former can never produce permanent fruit by her ministry to the faithful so long as the pastors, left to themselves, remain in disorder and ignorance. The character of priests is a participation of the priesthood of Jesus Christ, the First Priest of the new law, who has given to His ministers the power of immolating His own flesh, and to nourish His faithful with it, so that those who eat it shall live eternally. To this power, which concerns His natural body, He invites an-

other, which extends over his mystical body, that is, over the faithful, whose sins priests bind and loose. A ministry so grand, sublime and august, richly deserves that we sacrifice ourselves to raise those who are called to it to a state to exercise it as they ought. This is true at all times, but still more so in this unhappy age, in which the Church has such sore need of ministers, according to the heart of God, who can banish that mass of vice and scandal which covers the earth, and over which true Christians should shed tears of blood. A good priest is able to undertake anything for the glory of God; he can obtain the conversion of the most hardened sinners, and re-establish good order in the house of the Lord. The welfare of Christianity depends upon priests, and when they are what they ought to be, the people honor them, listen to their voice and follow their example. We may doubt if all the disorders seen in the world ought not to be attributed to bad priests; I know this proposition is enough to affright us, but it should scandalize no one. We have discussed it sharply in several conferences, and the conclusion is, that it is, at least, very certain that the Church has no more cruel enemies than bad priests. It is they who have given birth to heresies, have accredited error, have made vice and ignorance reign; they are the origin of those fatal torrents that have swept over the earth. Some have contributed thereto by depravity of manners, others by crimi-

nal indolence, which prevented their putting a stop to evil, as they were obliged to do."

To judge of the impression made on the minds and hearts of the missionaries by this discourse, we must revert to the fruits it produced in the seminaries under their charge. Before the establishment of the seminaries, whole dioceses could be found in which not one ecclesiastic dressed in black. They seemed more like lay persons than priests, and, after having said mass, they labored at mercenary employments. Things were much changed after the erection of seminaries—most of them wore cassacks, the least regular wore the short soutan. In the style of wearing their hair, and in their whole exterior, there was nothing which could wound clerical decorum. The tribunal of penance was more frequented; some priests gave up good benefices to take care of souls, to catechise and to hear confessions in the most abandoned parishes. Several of these virtuous ecclesiastics sweetly drew their most wayward brethren to spiritual conferences, and by this means reformed a large number. In places where catechism had never been taught, they established it for the instruction of children. The zeal and assiduity with which the young priests, who left the seminary, discharged the essential part of their ministry, roused their neighbors, and in a few years there was scarcely a parish in which youth were not instructed with success, although they had

been, heretofore, criminally neglected. These assurances of the benediction that God shed upon the labors of the missionaries, were confirmed by the testimony of two holy bishops, Mgr. Alain de Solminihac, of Cahors, and Mgr. John d'Arenthon d'Alex. The first thus wrote to the servant of God: "You would be delighted to see my clergy, and would bless God a thousand times, if you knew the good that your brethren have done in my seminary, which good is being spread over the whole province." The second bishop was one of the worthiest prelates that has succeeded St. Francis de Sales. His testimony is inserted in his will. What time more proper to banish all false delight and congratulation than that of a man on the threshold of eternity, just about to appear before his God?

XXXVII.

SERVICES RENDERED BY VINCENT DE PAUL TO COMMUNITIES OF MEN AND WOMEN, TO ARMIES, AND TO COUNTRIES WHICH HAD BEEN THE THEATRE OF WAR.

Vincent had not less love for religious than for secular ecclesiastics. Far from believing that the humble state which they had embraced was a reason for contemning them, he found therein motives to esteem them with singular veneration.

He was far from imputing to the body the fall of private members, unlike some, who thereby evince a malignity as unjust as it is common. He knew that those who pardon nothing would complain loudly if they were to be judged as they judge others, and that an imperfect monk would be apt, in the world, to be a very scandalous secular. Besides, engrossed as he was with his own necessities, he did not amuse himself by diving into the defects of those for whom he was not responsible. He did not even see their defects, unless they occurred in his very presence. He conjured his brethren by the bowels of the charity of Jesus Christ to respect all the orders established in the church, to banish from their hearts envy, jealousy and like passions, that accord not with humility nor with the charity they owe their neighbor. He often repeated these beautiful words: "I would much prefer to lose a hundred establishments rather than prevent one of another community."

His tender affection for regulars was particularly manifested in the zeal with which he restored to the first spirit of their institute those who had departed from them. The reforms of Grandmont, Premontré, St. Genevieve and Chancelade, are an eternal monument of the activity and extent of his charity. It was not confined to some mumerous communities, which, like those of which we are about to speak, deserve more esteem; it spread even to isolated houses and to private members. The King, having refused to accept for Abbot of

Mount-Saint-Eloi, one of the three, which, according to the custom of Artois, the religious of that monastery had presented to him, Vincent did his utmost to extricate the religious from their embarrassment, and, in concert with them, to place at their head a man according to God's own heart.

However, his love for the monastic state was neither soft nor blind. He did not approve of members passing from one order to another without genuine and solid reasons. He wished that every one should sanctify himself in his vocation. "I compasssonate your trials," wrote he to a regular, "have patience, my Rev. Father, and accept them in our Lord, who is pleased thus to exercise you. The religious state wherein you are placed, is as a vessel agitate by waves, but it will conduct you happily to the port. I cannot, as you wish, recommend to God the idea you have to pass to another order, because it seems to me it is not His will. There are crosses everywhere, and at your advanced age you should avoid those which you might find by changing your state of life."

There is scarcely a religious community in all France to which he did not render some service, either to the community as a body or to private members. The Abbot of St. Genevieve and the canons regular of his congregation, in their letter to Clement XI., on the 28th of May, 1706, acknowledged that the Cardinal de la Rochefoucault, deputed by the Holy See to reform them, found, while effecting the reformation, much assistance from the

counsels of Vincent de Paul. Henry de Briqueville of Luzerne, Bishop of Cahors, in his letter of the 10th of May, 1706, to the same Pope, said that the servant of God aided Mr. Solminihac, one of his predecessors, to re-establish ancient discipline in the monasteries of the diocese of Cahors, and that he sustained him at Rome and in France in the reform of the orders of Chancelade, of which he was Abbot and first Superior. Henry de la Marche wrote to the same pontiff, the 24th of June, 1706, that the order of Grandmont, of which he was Abbot, owed Vincent much; that he had rendered it services that it could not fail to acknowledge without ingratitude, and that he had encouraged those that had recourse to him to re-establish discipline therein. The Abbots of Bonfay and Rongeval, both of the order of Prémontré, in their letter of the 24th of September, in the same year, to Clement XI., said that men were so inimical to the reform which they had wished to introduce into some of their houses, that, if this holy priest had not employed in their favor all his credit with the King, there was no ground of human hope that this project could have succeeded. In truth, some of these reforms were so strongly opposed, that to judge by the efforts of different persons to hinder them, we would be tempted to believe that it was wished to annihilate the religious state. Those who were displeased at them sought to influence the King to foil them. A number of persons of rank and authority spoke of them as we do of a condemned criminal. To sus-

tain the religious, Vincent was obliged to take part against the powerful ones of the age.

Besides the reform of the houses of which we have spoken, he supported those of the order of St. Anthony, St. Bernard, and St. Benedict. He was a special friend of Dom Gregory Larisse, first Superior General of the congregation of Saint Maur, and this perfect religious always honored him as a model of virtue. Charles Fremond, reformer of Grandmont, and all those who loved regularity, spoke of him in the same terms,—it was only justice and gratitude. He accomplished a hundred times in their favor what no one else would have wished to undertake. He spoke in the King's behalf to those of the Generals who had not an extraordinary taste for reform, so as to induce them to be pleased to establish it in the houses that wished it. In a word, he did, in order to re-establish ancient observances, everything that he was accustomed to do to preserve in his children the first spirit of their vocation.

We may, therefore, judge of his joy at seeing a large number of famous monasteries restored, during his time, to what they had been in their palmiest days, and the grief with which he saw some others sacrifice their conscience to a love of a false and damnable liberty. Some of the services which the Saint rendered to a countless number of monasteries were never known, save to such as could not be ignorant of them. Beside the services that he rendered to the order of Malta, and for which he re-

ceived from the Grand Master, Paul Lascaris, (descended from those Counts of Vintimille, who sprung from the ancient Emperors of Constantinople,) a letter of thanks, he was so happy as to render services to the Reverend Fathers Minims. It was in consideration of these same services that, in 1621, Francis de Maida, General of the Reverend Fathers Minims, granted to Vincent letters of association, which made him a participant, in perpetuity, of the prayers, sacrifices, fasts, indulgences, and every good work which they did or which they might hereafter do. We know not what was the nature of the favors the holy man conferred on those worthy religious. He was always as attentive to hide his good works as false devotees are exact in proclaiming those they may do from time to time.

What Vincent did to establish order among religious men he did with still more eagerness to re-establish or preserve it in monasteries of ladies. He knew, with St. Cyprian, that the more virgins consecrated to God effect to the honor of His Church, by the regularity of their lives, the more have they need of being strengthened against their own weakness, and he was not ignorant that bad example, which is everywhere contagious, is still more so in houses of persons more easily led astray. Hence it was that he always procured them Abbesses and Superiors who owed not their vocation either to flesh or blood, but only to the will of God.

When Abbesses had the right of election, he pre-

served it to them, and opposed vigorously the intrigue and strategy of certain religious, who, despairing to rise to the first place in that way, wished to do so by the credit of their relatives and the authority of the King. He acted thus with regard to those who, having been elected three years, according to the usage of their communities, solicited briefs of continuation. Well persuaded that the fervor or relaxation of female communities comes ordinarily from those who are at the head of the monasteries, he was always firm in not having any named for Abbesses except such as were the most efficient, the most experienced, and the most exact to all regular observances. Thus, when some Abbesses, under the pretext of age or infirmity, asked for coadjutrix a sister, a niece, or some other relative, to whom they were too much attached, the holy man,—a declared enemy to these too human affections, sought but the general good, and nothing whatever that they could say or do could change him. His reason was, that when Abbacies became vacant by the death of the Abbesses, the community is free to choose virtuous and efficient persons, capable of maintaining good order, if it exists, or re-establishing it, if wanting, whereas, by means of those assistants, a religious who has little virtue often succeeds another who had little more.

When, contrary to his advice, Superiors were placed at the head of monasteries who were not yet imbued with the religious spirit, and who, consequently, were incapable of governing well, this zeal-

ous minister of our Lord did not abandon them. He engaged them to pass some time in fervent communities, so that they might there imbibe virtue, as a child imbibes milk from its mother's breast. It was to effect this happy result that several times he had Abbesses and assistants enter as boarders into the monasteries of the Visitation, whose regularity he knew.

When dissensions arose in female monasteries, he took advantage of every available means to put a stop to these flames of disease, which, as the Apostle tells us, a spark often enkindles. He caused some virtuous and experienced persons, endowed with royal authority, to engage their majesties to enjoin upon the bishops of the places, or superiors of the same order, to watch over the execution of the regulations it had been judged proper to make, either to establish strict cloister or to arrest other abuses that might have been introduced. The Abbey of the Perrine and that of Estival, both situated in the diocese of Mans, experienced his charity. The last was in great disorder. There was a faction opposed to the Abbess, and she complained that it was incited by the Bishop, with whom she was at law. Vincent advised the Queen, and she sent thither four religious of Val-de-Grâce, with the consent of the Bishop of Mans and the Abbess of Estival. The needed reform was happily introduced in 1648, and peace succeeded to the dissensions which had been reigning but too long. To the Abbey of Perrine, the Saint sent thither the Mother Louise-Eugenia

de Fontaine, who re-established order. Mother Angelica l'Huillier, by his orders, accomplished the same thing in the monastery of the Conception in the Street St. Honorius in Paris. The Saint himself, for the same purpose, repaired to Beauvais to assist the Ursulines of that city, and, like his Divine Master, it needed but one word from him to restore peace to the most troubled consciences.

The Marchioness of Maignelai, in 1618, had founded, near the temple, a house of retreat, to put a stop to the disorders of her sex there indulged. Quite a number presented themselves, who appeared charmed to find so secure a port after shipwreck, but it was evident from the commencement that this establishment failed in an essential point, since there was not in this great institution a single person capable of conducting it properly. To avert the danger to an institution so necessary, Vincent was advertised of the posture of affairs. As superior of the religious of the Vistation, he could dispose of these holy daughters, and he was entreated to entrust the care of this community to them. He consulted God, and having conferred with the Archbishop of Paris, selected four religious of the Visitation to fill the first offices in the Magdalen Monastery. The religious, who, by their state, make special profession of charity and meekness, were the best suited to gain the affection of these penitent souls, whom they could not bring forth to Jesus Christ without infinite pains. The good religious acquitted themselves of this charge with

their accustomed zeal and address. They established order in a house where it was almost unknown—charity rendering them absolute mistresses. To attain to this is always advantageous, when it is desired for so excellent an end. These religious ruled this numerous community so well that it produced afterwards those of Rouen and Bordeaux. It is true that Vincent served them much, either by the wise counsels that he gave them, verbally, or by letter, or by the good confessors that he procured for them, but the zeal and labor of these virtuous ladies were not less estimable: children lose nothing of their glory by sharing it with their father.

The lights and protection of the holy priest were not less useful to the community of the daughters of Providence, whose superior he was. It had been established by Madam de Pollallion for four years. This pious widow, trained up in the school of Vincent de Paul, had been taught to practice the most solid virtues of Christianity. Although she had scarcely any other endowment than dependence on Providence, she undertook to afford an asylum to young persons of her sex, whose beauty, indigence, dependence, or the bad conduct of their parents, might be an occasion of degradation before God and man. The Archbishop of Paris desired to know what our Saint thought of this new establishment before granting his full approbation. Vincent made two regular visits, so as to judge of the talents and vocation of those who presented themselves to com-

mence the formation of this new-born society. From the thirty young persons there, he selected seven who appeared to him best suited to serve as the foundation of this edifice. He gave them advice worthy of his exalted wisdom, and infused into their hearts some of the living fire which consumed his own. Four years after, in 1651, he induced Anna of Austria to give them the hospital de la Santé, situated in the faubourg of St. Martial, which is their present residence. It is contiguous to the monastery f Val-de-Grâce, where this Princess usually spent .he festivals of the year. This made her prefer the location for them, because, as she says in her articles of contract for the donation, she wished to have under her eyes an establishment from which she hoped so much good. The event fully realized an expectation so worthy of the Queen. The house of Providence has always been and is still, to-day, the good odor of Jesus Christ. The spirit of Vincent, its first superior, is there perpetuated, and, although gratitude is not the virtue of the age, it is notorious that the Daughters of Providence owe not less to the holy priest than to their virtuous foundress.

These holy daughters were objects of his care for more than thirty years. We have a letter that the holy man wrote to the Duchess of Liancourt, after the death of Madam de Pollallion. We remark therein some of those pious artifices of charity, found in the epistle of St. Paul to Philemon. "You may have learned," said he, "of the decease of this good

servant of God, and that a few days after, we assembled at the Duchess of Aiguillon's, to see if it was expedient to sustain this good work, and if so, by what means. Now the conclusion was, that we should try to sustain it according to the spirit of its rule." The Saint afterwards remarked to the Duchess of Liancourt that she and the late Marchioness of Margnelai had been the first instruments made use of by God, to secure from shipwreck the purity of virgins, who now glorify His Divine Goodness in time and in eternity, and who, perhaps, would otherwise have offended Him in time, and be already, some of them, at least, cursing Him with the reprobate in eternity. Hence, he concluded that it would be becoming in a Christian soul to finish her work.

So Christian a letter had the effect that Vincent anticipated. The providence of God preserved this establishment,—it has had its reverses, but not in matters relating to piety, and although the ladies that compose the community make only simple vows, which the worldly-minded look upon as of little moment, it was unheard of more than a century after its foundation, and perhaps still, that any one had left. I must be pardoned for dwelling so long on this matter; the zeal that these prudent virgins have evinced for the glory of St. Vincent, well merits that posterity should be made acquainted with St. Vincent's zeal for them.

Besides the communities of the Christian Union, and the Propagation of the Faith, which he united

in a single body, the Saint gave a mighty impetus to the exertions in favor of the house for orphan girls, that Mademoiselle de Lestang had established near the Pré-au-Clerc; he succored it in its greatest needs. Vincent gave Mademoiselle de Lestang some excellent counsels, calculated to form this foundress to the art of governing. He counselled her to choose from her community, then composed of two hundred members, three or four of the most intelligent, to share with her the burden of business; to assemble them from time to time, to seek their advice and that of the director of the house, who belonged to her conference, and to look upon it as a temptation to desire to do everything by herself; it seems that she had failed in these respects. These daughters conceived it to be an honor to follow his counsels, and a duty to imitate his virtues.

The servant of God had also a share in the foundation of the Daughters of St. Genevieve. Three young ladies, who felt attracted to unite in community life, and to associate with themselves persons of their own sex, who thought as they did, believed that, in order to avoid a false step, they should do nothing without taking advice from Vincent, whom they looked upon as a Saint full of light and prudence. After praying them to consult God for eight days, and having done the same himself, he said that God wished to make use of them to give a new company to His Church, that would derive glory from it, and that their neighbors would reap much advantage therefrom,—time has proved that

the Saint spoke in the spirit of prophecy. These daughters were afterwards united in holy commerce of virtue, to those of Madam de Miramion, partaking of their spiritual goods and communicating to them those which they already possessed.

There are few establishments that owe more to the holy priest than that of the Sisters of the Holy Cross. The insolence of a master, who had dared to attempt the honor of one of his pupils, having revealed that young ladies are never more secure than when under the care of persons of their own sex, it was projected to unite those who were disposed to lend themselves to this good work. Four presented themselves to Roye, in Picardy, where the scandal had occurred; but the war having obliged them to withdraw into Paris, Maria l'Huillier de Villeneure received them with kindness, and had sufficient proof of their talents, to feel interested in the success of so beautiful a design, but before engaging in it, she would consult Vincent. The Saint taught her to train her daughters and to enable them to train others. They took the name of Sisters of the Holy Cross, on account of the trials they had undergone; yet what they had suffered was but a prelude to what was in reserve for them. Madam de Villeneuve, whose long infirmities had not allowed her to establish them fully, sank at this most trying moment. Soon they found themselves deprived of their most reliable resources, and persons who had been most interested in the congregation, were of opinion that it should either be suppressed

or permanently affiliated to another community. Several assemblies were held to discuss this subject —almost every voice was for suppression. Vincent, who rarely struggled against the majority, made it evident that this establishment should be sustained. "It is the work of God," said he, "and it must not be destroyed; this community numbers five members, but this number will be increased—the rivulet is small, but it will receive tributary waters until it becomes larger."

These words, in connection with existing circumstances, seemed so far from being credible that it was difficult to believe that they would not be falsified in the event; hence, they were regarded as a prophecy or else as the effect of a secret illusion. However, their verification was not long delayed. Vincent engaged Madam de Traversay to take part in this good work. The holy widow entirely devoted herself to it, and surmounted, by her influence and the help of the man of God, the obstacles that met her at every step. She removed the difficulties, and by means of her labors placed these Sisters in a position to serve the Church effectually. As a director enters very much into the spiritual edifice of a community, the Saint, with permission of the ordinary, placed a superior there who, by his lights, finished what Madam de Villeneuve had but projected. In fine, this congregation, so tottering, was in the ascendancy, and soon it was acknowledged that this tree, too long the sport of the winds, produced fruits of justice and salvation. "The

Daughters of the Cross," says Mr. Abelly, "have contributed, and still contribute to the sanctification of a large number of souls. They not only train up such as wish to share their labors, but they exercise towards the poor all the works of spiritual charity in their power, teach the truths of faith to the uninstructed, and dispose for good general confessions such as have need of making them; in a word, they enter, like the other congregations, of which we have just been treating, into those apostolic functions, from which the law of God does not exclude them." The historian of our Saint was not wrong when he says that although Vincent was not the founder of the Sisters of the Holy Cross, he was their restorer and preserver, and that, without the charitable hand that he extended to them, at a time when everything conspired against them, their fall was certain and their ruin inevitable. Before dismissing this subject we would remark, with one of the Sisters of the Holy Cross, (Sister Froger) that the Saint, in upholding their establishment, wronged, in a manner, the Sisters of Charity, since he bestowed favors on the former, that he could have dispensed to the latter. Thus did this holy man, whose views were all marked with the seal of disinterestedness, sacrifice his own work to the furthering of a foreign work, or, rather, no work relating to God could seem foreign to the eye of a man in whose heart all were as one, provided they tended to the glory of God.

When an offended God poured out the phials of

His fury upon the people of Lorraine, Vincent congregated the dispersed virgins of that ill-fated province. He took under his protection the Benedictines, who were nearly starved. After conferring with the ladies of his assembly, he had them come to Paris, to the number of fourteen. The ladies received them with all the attention suitable to their dignity as consecrated spouses of God. The edifying conduct of these holy religious made it evident that God tried them only because they were pleasing in His eyes. But, at last, Providence, to indemnify them, gave them, in France, what they could not find in Lorraine. Some ladies of piety, the Countess of Châteauvieux and the Marchioness of Baûme, who had ardently wished there was a monastery, to repair, by perpetual adoration, the outrages offered to Jesus Christ, in the Eucharist, judged these religious suited to carry out their designs. Anne of Austria, in consequence of a vow to obtain peace for her Kingdom, came herself to place the cross over the door of this community, and gave to her subjects a striking and moving example of religion, by casting herself at the feet of the Son of God, to make Him a solemn reparation for the injuries that He receives, at all times, in the Sacrament of His love. It is, therefore, one of the principal duties of these religious, night and day, to kneel, by turns, in the middle of the choir, a cord around the neck, at the foot of a pillar, in order to appease the anger of God by this humiliating position, and still more by the lamentations of their hearts.

The good works which we have mentioned did not make him forget the daughters of St. Francis de Sales. At different times he visited the monastery in the street St. Antoine, and that of the suburbs, St. James. He saw there, with pleasure, all that piety and concord possess that is most sweet and consoling. These holy daughters have since declared that the presence of Vincent was to them always a source of grace and benediction; that he had peculiarly the rare gift of calming their disquietudes, and that several of their number, who were the butt of very strong and importunate temptations, found themselves entirely delivered when they had the happiness of conversing with him. Madam de Chantal, who came to Paris in 1641, acknowledged with gratitude that the lights and counsels of this great servant of God had been of great assistance to her in her own private devotion, and that of her order. The spiritual blessings with which God loaded His servant, by means of our Saint, were for her so many graces of preparation for her last sacrifice. For a long time she had been ripe for Heaven, and five weeks had hardly elapsed from her departure from Paris when, at Moulins, in Bourbonnais, she finished, by a most holy death, a life that she had passed in the exercise of Christian and religious piety. God revealed to His servant, St. Vincent, her death and her glory.

From his life, by Abelly, we can learn the advantageous opinion the ladies of the Visitation entertained of St. Vincent. We find therein a feeble

outline of his soul, which, for the most part, his own hand unconsciously traced, contrary even to his wishes, for he always covered his virtues with the veil of silence and humility; but God willed that he should thus innocently be deceived, and in some sort betray himself, in order to manifest better the excellent qualities of his soul, thus to render him a worthy instrument of the Divine glory, and to make him serve in the great things which were to be effected for the church. The Saint was several times tempted to relinquish the care of these religious, but the Archbishop of Paris desired him to continue, to daughters so worthy of his care, the services which had proved so fruitful. The Saint, to whom the voice of the prelate of the church of God was always the voice of God Himself, was forced to obey, but to prevent his example being detrimental, and to ensure his missionaries being allowed to give themselves entirely to the functions proper to their institute, he framed a rule forbidding his brethren to direct or frequent the houses of religious. He, however, allowed them to yield, and he himself yielded later, but not until he could no longer resist without offending God, namely, when war, famine, and pestilence had snatched away or dispersed all those that were suited to discharge this office: "An office," which, however, he said in a letter to Mr. Lambert, "the missionaries ought not for anything in the world to take upon themselves, since it is contrary to their vocation, and might lead to dangerous consequences."

It was, then, contrary to the letter of the law, laid down by this wise Superior, that Mr. Joly, one of his successors, accepted, towards the end of the last century, the direction of the royal house of Saint-Cyr, but that charge was bestowed by such honorable and honored hands, according to the estimation of the world, that he could not reasonably resist. Besides, religion, piety, humility, joined to elevation of mind, and the most attentive zeal for the education of the precious, noble offspring, that diffused the good odor of Jesus Christ through all parts of the kingdom—all these virtues which make this house of St. Louis a model that the most regular houses could imitate—sufficiently demonstrate that the wisest rules are subject to exceptions which God authorizes.

The course that Vincent run was so brilliant that it seems marvellous. Let us forget, then, if we can, all the services which he rendered to armies and to countries that had been theatres of war, and draw a parallel between his life and the lives of those men of mercy who have reflected honor on the church in her palmiest days. In 1636, after fire and sword had laid waste the extremities of the kingdom, they penetrated even to its centre. The Spanish army, under the conduct of the famous John de Wert and Prince Thomas, took, in a few days, Capella, Catelet, and Corbie, and the governor, who had made desperate resistance, was condemned to be drawn and quartered. The destruction of this last city caused so great a consternation

in Paris, (as the advance guard of the enemy was not more than ten or twelve leagues away), that a number of the inhabitants took flight, carrying away their valuables. The Cardinal de Richelieu, who had returned to the capital to re-assure the people, and appease their murmurings, raised twenty thousand men, the most part lackeys or apprentices whom their masters had been obliged to dismiss, in virtue of a decree of the council. The Parisians, affrighted, gave more than was needed for the support of this militia; the house of St. Lazarus contributed thereto in a truly singular manner. It was made a rendezvous for arms, and the newly-enrolled soldiers were there drilled to military exercises. The outhouses, parlors, court-yards, and old religious cloisters were filled with men of war.

The King, who believed that everything would succeed against his enemies if he were so happy as to enlist in his interest the God of armies, had ordered that efforts should be made for the sanctification of his troops: it was in consideration for this religious prince's wishes that the Chancellor commanded Vincent de Paul to send twenty of his missionaries to the camp. A report, too well founded, that a contagious disease had attacked the troops, was a motive for these worthy laborers to hasten their arrival. "The plague is in the army," wrote Vincent to one of them, "go there, my dear sir; go in the same spirit that St. Francis Xavier went to the Indies, and, like him, bear away the crown that Jesus Christ has merited for you by His precious

blood, and which He will give you if you honor His charity."

Fidelity in fulfilling their missions drew down the benedictions of Heaven upon these worthy ministers and upon their labors. They bore up courageously under fatigue,—by the twentieth of September, four thousand soldiers had already approached the sacrament of penance with a great effusion of tears. It is notorious that those who bear arms are never so intrepid as when they are at peace with God; this army, although composed in part of new troops, accomplished miracles. Picardy was tranquilized, and the citizens of Paris thought themselves safe. The missionaries returned,—some of them had been attacked by the contagious disease, but God had preserved them to His church.

Lorraine and the Duchy of Bar formed the second field opened to the zeal of the servant of God. These two provinces, formerly so populous, so fertile, had as sovereign during thirteen years, Charles IV., a valiant prince, greedy of glory, strong enough to disquiet his neighbors, too feeble to bear up against them, always ready to come to accommodations, and still readier to break them. A hero of this stamp possessed all that was necessary to desolate his own teritories. The Imperialists, the French, the Spanish, the Swedes, and the Lorrainese themselves ravaged Lorraine in turn, and sometimes together. The Duke of Weymer, at the head of the Swedish troops, rendered more furious by dif-

ference of religion, committed the greatest ravages. It is said that they bore, as their standard, Lorraine under the figure of a woman, hacked in two from head to foot, and surrounded by soldiers holding sharp swords in one hand and a flaming torch in the other. If this be true, never was emblem more appropriate. The Swedes acted in that unfortunate country like furious lions in the sheep-fold into which they have broken. They respected neither the sacred nor the profane. A part of the cities, towns and villages were deserted, the rest were reduced to ashes. Those which the soldiers could not take, suffered everything most terrible in plague and famine. The inhabitants, pale, emaciated, disfigured, believed themselves happy when they could eat the grass and roots of the fields in peace. Acorns and wild fruits were sold in the market for man's nourishment. Even dead animals, and the most noisome carrion, were sought with avidity. Two mothers agreed to eat their only sons. All that we read most terrible of the famine in Samaria and Jerusalem is less than was seen there. We know not that during the siege of the Holy City children devoured their parents—these horrors were reserved for Lorraine, the only country in the world which has given to the universe a more fearful spectacle than that of the last siege of Jerusalem.

Five armies, that France then supported, consumed a part of the help that charity, in less stormy periods, consecrated to the wants of the unfortunate. Things were in this state when Vincent,

animated with the spirit of which the first priest of the Old Law was replenished, undertook to place himself between the living and the dead, and to erect the standard of charity in a country in which justice had no influence, lawful authority was accounted nothing, and the laws of sovereigns sounded forth feebly, even powerlessly. The holy man rekindled, by the power of his discourses, and even by his tears, the spirit of compassion, that had near become extinct. He had recourse to the Queen, the Duchess of Aiguillon, and the ladies of his association. He himself gave the example of a holy and generous liberality. He saved the lives, and often, the honor, of the inhabitants of twenty-five cities, and of an infinite number of towns and villages. The sick received from him every kind of help which they could expect from the most tender charity. Vincent procured clothing for those who were destitute, that is, not only for a prodigious number among the dregs of the people, of every age and sex, but also for a number of young ladies of rank, on the verge of destruction in more senses than one; for a number of religious, whose monasteries had been pillaged; for a number of virgins, consecrated to God, who were as disfigured as those spoken of by the prophet Jeremiah, and who, for the most part, had neither veils nor shoes, and who, covered with rags, equally ridiculous and incongruous, had till then announced, without effect, to all Europe the extremity of their poverty.

The Saint, in dispensing alms, took every mea-

sure that the most consummate prudence could dictate. He sent twelve of his missionaries, full of zeal and intelligence, into different parts of the country. He associated with them some brothers of his congregation, who had means for guarding against the plague, and who understood medicine and surgery. He drew up a long and wise rule, by means of which they could avoid offending bishops, pastors, governors, and magistrates. He prescribed that they should consult them, so as to avoid surprise, and proportion their assistance to the wants and rank of those to whom they ought to be applied. It was in following this plan that he contented the poor, so often intractable, nearly always disposed to murmurs and complaints, and rarely as attentive to the favors bestowed as to those which they imagine to be in store for them. The holy ardor that he communicated to some of the best families of Paris, disposed them to make almost incredible efforts during nearly twenty years; efforts which posterity can hardly credit, but as the evil was almost universal and extreme, it was necessary, if I may so express myself, to multiply, by wise arrangement, helps which, although very considerable in themselves, were, nevertheless, inadequate to the necessities of the country. Poverty of detail and lowliness of subject induce us to sacrifice to the delicacy of the reader, the recital of particulars which, though very proper to edify all possessed of charity, would, nevertheless, fatigue the imagination. It suffices to remark, that there were in Metz and its environs an

astonishing concourse of poor. It was like a miserable army. Every morning ten or twelve were found dead, without counting those, who, surprised in flight, fell a prey to ravenous beasts, for furious wolves were yet another of the scourges with which God struck this unfortunate people. Accustomed to feed on the dead, these animals revenged on the living what failed them in the dead, attacking them during the day, tearing them in pieces, devouring women and children. The towns and villages were infested with these animals at all times, for even during the night they entered through the breaches in the walls, and carried away all that they could seize on.

Day and night the holy priest was occupied with these calamities and the ways of remedying them. He really remedied them, sending into the country an immense amount of money, stuffs, clothing, and bedding. Never did a man better deserve the name of "Father of the Poor." Lorraine should transmit, from age to age, to the last generation, that to him its children are indebted for life, because he saved the lives of their parents. The magistrates of nearly all the villages acknowledged the cares he had bestowed. They thanked the Saint in the name of their brethren, as St. Paul thanked Philemon for having succored the servants of God in their extreme neeessities. "*Quia viscera sanctorum requieverunt in te.*" *

* "Because the bowels of the Saints have been refreshed by thee."

The people of Lorraine not only experienced the charity of Vincent de Paul in their own country; a large number of them felt its effects in Paris. The missioner who, by order of the holy priest, carried money into Lorraine, informed Vincent that there were a number of young ladies of rank, who, having no property, parents, nor any means of subsistence, were exposed to the brutality of the officers and soldiery. Such imminent peril alarmed the servant of God and the ladies of his assembly. They were unremitting in their exertions until as many of these ladies as wished had been brought to Paris, and they then concerted means for their subsistence. The deputy of our Saint escorted one hundred and sixty, paying the expenses of the journey. Vincent took in charge a large number of little boys who were perishing. He shared the care of the rest of this new colony with Madamoiselle Le Gras – the holy widow received the ladies into her house. These young persons were placed, each one according to her rank, some as ladies, others as chambermaids or in inferior employments. The Saint received the little boys at St. Lazarus until he could provide places for them.

The Hand of God continued to weigh so heavily upon Lorraine, that its inhabitants were seen going out in caravans, to slip through the hostile armies, hazarding everything to find an asylum in Paris. It was this desertion, joined to the mortality, that depeopled this province so much, that according to Dom Calmet, Vincent's late historian, an entire cen-

tury did not suffice to repair its losses. The missionaries of the province busied themselves as much as they could in facilitating this transmigration, but Vincent bore the burden of the work. A large number of these poor refugees came directly to St. Lazarus, where they were secure of finding a man to whom all were as one in Jesus Christ, and who while exerting himself to fulfill the duties of charity, took care of the stranger without being unmindful of the citizen. Not to be discouraged at a concourse which seemed to have no end, a heart as large and expanded as that of Vincent de Paul was needed, but generosity was the basis of his character. The people of Lorraine experienced this; they acknowledged that this priest, whose name was so famous throughout the country, was greater than his reputation. Whilst the holy man was securing for them means of gaining a livelihood, he obtained lodgings in his vicinity, and procured bread and clothing for them, and as they had not approached the sacraments for some time, owing to want of pastors, he gave them missions, two years in succession, in the parish of the Chepelle, a little village about half a league from Paris. Thus did Vincent provide for the necessities of soul and body.

The succors were continued, when by orders of the Queen Regent, under the direction of the servant of God, his missionaries dispensed considerable ones in several villages of Artois and the neighboring country which the King's army had taken, such as Arras, Bapeume, Hesdin, Landrecies and Grave-

lines. It would be difficult to make an exact calculation of all the sums of money that our Saint distributed in Lorraine, Barrois and the country just named. Matthew Renard, brother of the mission, who carried them, and was, of all others, most capable of naming the exact amount, gives it at nearly two millions—a sum that was much greater in those days than four millions would be now, and which, though large, was still larger at a time when misery was extreme, and the richest persons were straightened. The Saint, sent at different times, and in all, fourteen thousand yards of cloth, of every color and quality, to clothe the nobles, townsmen and poor. If we join to this prodigious outlay that which he must have made for linen and ornaments for despoiled churches, to bring to Paris those young ladies and boys, of whom we have spoken, and to maintain them until provided for, for persons who came to him of their own accord, and add to all this, what he did in favor of countries laid waste by war, we must count it as a miracle, and cannot fail to recognize in him the liveliest and most universal charity.

The spirit of discord which pervaded France broke out in 1650, with unusual impetuosity. Our enemies profited by these divisions. The Spaniards advanced to our frontiers and took Catelet, Capelle and Rhétel. Their armies and those that opposed them, ravaged the greater part of Picardy and Champagne, and soon reduced those unfortunate provinces to almost as sad a state as that

of Lorraine. These sorrowful tidings touched Vincent; he sent two missionaries, with provisions and five hundred francs. These two priests saw at a glance that this amount of assistance bore no proportion to the magnitude of the evil.

They found so many wretched beings along the hedges and in the highways, some exhausted, others in a dying condition, that their provisions were consumed in an instant. They hastened to the neighboring cities to buy more, but what was their surprise to see these cities in as deplorable a state as the country! Everything had failed. Death, poverty, hunger and the most humiliating deprivations were almost universal. In this sad conjuncture, these gentlemen wrote to Vincent that the desolation of the country was general, that the armies had harvested the grain, and that the people, stripped to nakedness, were reduced to the greatest straits, and were dying of misery.

The servant of God, to spare the purses of the ladies of his assembly, drained by the immense alms they had sent to Lorraine, or by their enormous expenditures in favor of foundlings, besought the Archbishop of Paris to recommend to the faithful the wants of Picardy and Champagne. In consequence of the orders of the prelate, Christian pulpits resounded with the cries and lamentations of these two provinces. Preachers had no need of hyperbole —the misery exceeded all power of expression. An abridgment of the most forcible and touching expressions of the Latin and Greek Fathers was print-

ed and disseminated to move the faithful in favor of their suffering brethren. The evil was pressing; a quarter of an hour's delay might render it incurable. Vincent sent sixteen of his missionaries with the first fruits of his exertions, and later, some Sisters of Charity. These excellent daughters, whom the Hand of God protected, and whose virtue ever placed them above insult, fulfilled all the duties of their profession in a most edifying manner. The extent of the misery could not be known until the arrival of the priests and sisters. The Vermandois, Thiérache, a large part of the Soissonnois, the Rhemois and Lyonese were in the deplorable situation of those cities of which we read that God had struck in His anger. The missionaries found some who had died of starvation, whose bodies had been partly devoured by beasts. In thirty-five villages that they visited, they saw nearly six hundred persons whose misery was so extreme that they seized upon dogs and horses, after the wolves had picked them. In the single city of Guise, there were more than five hundred sick in caves and caverns, more suited for retreats for beasts than lodgings for men. The poor had no other food than lizards, snakes, frogs and grass. The people of these frontiers had no bread, linen, wood nor bedding, and, moreover, were without pastors or spiritual helps, because the greater part of their pastors were either dead or sick, and the churches had been pillaged or reduced to ruins. In the single diocese of Lyons, a hundred churches were counted, in which, for lack of ornaments, mass

could not be celebrated. Those who inflicted all these evils and many others, that I suppress, could not read them to-day without shedding tears.

Further news from St. Quintin was of the like nature,—in that city were seven or eight thousand dying of hunger, without counting twelve hundred persons of the environs, who were refugees. The city, far from being able to relieve the latter, was unable to succor its own citizens; part of whom, being obliged to leave it, died one after another on the road; those who remained in the city, owing to their nakedness, dared not appear, and remained within, lying on litters of straw. There were three hundred families of these bashful poor, and fifty priests reduced to the last extremity. "The famine is so pressing," wrote a missionary, "that we see men eating the earth, browsing the grass, snatching the bark off trees, tearing the rags by which they are covered, to swallow them, but what horrifies us, and which we would not dare to relate if we had not seen it, they eat their arms and hands, and die in this despair."

It is useless to prolong so affecting a detail. By the condition of Picardy, we may judge that of Champagne, Rheims, Rhétal, Sedan, Vancouleurs, and the neighboring cities, which had not less reason to lament than those mentioned above. The strongest terms fall below the reality. During ten years, that is, to the peace of the Pyrenees, such was the condition of two large provinces, and the five dioceses they contained. Vincent gave help in

every direction. During the first years the expense mounted up to thirty thousand pounds monthly, but considering the price of provisions, the multitude, and the many, many wants of the poor, it was necessary to use much management. The wants of the soul were not less than those of the body, and as these lay especially within the missionaries' sphere of duty, they neglected nothing that could conduce to spiritual good. They gave themselves neither repose nor intermission of labor. Those in health occupied these Fathers almost as much as the sick and the dying. If it was necessary to reconcile the latter to God, the former must be prevented from wandering. Extreme indigence led to many disorders, and these disorders are never more dangerous than when necessity, which is looked upon as superior to all law, seems to justify them. The period of which we speak furnishes some sad examples. These different duties engrossed several missionaries; the rest undertook what galley-slaves would have done with great repugnance.

After the battle of Rhétel, in which the Archduke Leopold and the Viscount de Turenne were defeated by Marshal Duplessis, two thousand Spaniards remained on the field without sepulture. More than eight weeks after the combat, they were still upon the field of battle, where a part had served as food to dogs and wolves; the rest exhaled a pestilential odor, which was insensibly carrying infection and death to all in the vicinity. The missionaries who traversed this canton were dis-

mayed at this spectacle. They asked Vincent for a sum of money to inter them. A delay of ten days would have rendered this enterprise so difficult that a thousand crowns would not have sufficed to accomplish it. It was effected, and these bodies were all interred. Labors of this nature exposed their health sensibly, but in what account should we hold health if, with the Apostle, we look upon death as gain? Undoubtedly these gentlemen had this idea of death; like St. Paul, they could say that from morning till night they encountered dangers of every kind.

These signal services merited for Vincent and the ladies of his society the eulogy and benediction of pastors, magistrates, and people. Every day the Saint received letters filled with the liveliest gratitude. The city of Rheims did not stop at thanks; it decreed that a Mass should be celebrated every day before the shrine of St. Remigius, for the benefactors of the city and province, and in order that all the inhabitants of the place might, at least once, give expression to their sentiments of gratitude, a general procession was arranged for the Monday after Pentecost of 1657, from the Metropolitan Church to that of Peter, to beseech God to show the fullness of His mercy to those who had so generously exercised it in favor of this afflicted people. All the troops in the city repaired to this pious ceremony, and they were followed by so great a crowd that Rheims, accustomed as it is to great spectacles, had never seen anything like this. In fact, neither Pi-

cardy nor Champagne could do too much for their benefactors,—the sum total of the alms that Vincent dispensed amounted to more than a million, including the expense he incurred for linen, clothes, ornaments for the church, seeds, and instruments of agriculture. The holy priest himself said that the palaces of the ladies of charity were like *warehouses of wholesale merchants.* Charity arranged all with order and decorum,—on one side could be seen a great number of albs, chasubles, missals, ciboriums, chalices, and divers church ornaments; on the other, a quantity of clothes, chemises, bedding, and garments of nearly every form, size, and material, for men, women, children, priests, and even gentle folks, who, reduced by the fortunes of war to the situation of the last of their vassals, derived nothing from their birth but the liveliest and bitterest sense of their misfortune.

That which gave increased value to the charity that Vincent exercised in these two provinces, was the necessity to which he soon saw himself reduced of dividing his resources, and conveying aid to other places. The insurrection of the people of Bordeaux, who revolted, after the example of the capital, obliged the Queen Regent to send thither a small army, under the Count de Palluau. The faction of the Prince of Condé was annihilated, but the Irish, who formed several regiments of our army, were very badly treated during two campaigns. The widows of their comrades in arms, and nearly one hundred and fifty orphans, who accompanied the

army, were, like them, reduced to a fearful situation. They marched barefooted in the midst of the snow, and in their passage to Troyes, in Champagne, assigned them for winter quarters, they were nine days without food. Their entrance into this city presented to the citizens the most terrible spectacle they had ever seen. A part were accommodated in St. Peter's Place, the rest, according to the account of 1655, *picked up in the street what dogs would not eat.*

Vincent de Paul was no sooner informed of this than he sent one of his priests, who, being an Irishman, was better suited to enter into their wants and to solace them; he carried with him a large sum of money, clothes and linen. By means of this charitable aid, so necessary and well applied, all those poor persons obtained lodgings, food, and clothing. The women and their daughters were placed in the St. Nicholas' Hospital. The orphans received special care, and the soldiers recovered; but as the views of the servant of God extended less to the body than to the soul, the missionary whom he had sent to Troyes, after having fulfilled the first part of his mission, devoted himself entirely to the second. Men who had come from a country where there were but few pastors to a kingdom whose language was unknown to them, needed instruction. He had the happiness of preparing them to eat the pasch of the Lord with the azymes of sincerity and Christian charity. The good example which the liberality of the ladies of Paris gave to

the ladies of Troyes induced them to imitate their conduct. These brave islanders, whom the violence of Cromwell had driven from their country, were Catholics. They had taken refuge in France with their wives and children, and to save their lives had entered in the King's army. They had contributed much to the reduction of Guienne and to raising the siege of Arras. They, the widows of their comrades and their children, well merited the care that was bestowed upon them.

The charity that Vincent extended to Troyes prevented him not from exercising it also in Paris and in cities and villages at less distance. War not only desolated the frontiers of the kingdom, the center, and the capital itself were ravaged. The siege of Etampes, and the unhappy battle of the Faubourg St. Antony, in which the Prince of Condé would have won an immortal name, if it were possible to gain one in arms against the King—so many marches, countermarches, encampments, and combats, at the very gates of Paris, and so to speak, in Paris itself, are fearful monuments of the frenzy that had seized upon our forefathers.

The poor, as generally happens, were the first and principal victims of these cruel dissensions. Hunger, and afterwards disease, were felt everywhere that the armies had passed. Etampes, Corbeil, Palaiseau, Saint Cloud, Gonesse, Saint Denis, Lagny, and, as we may suppose, all the villages around, appeared either as if a violent hail-storm had cut down everything, or as those vast

deserts of Arabia, never cultivated. Only the dead or dying could be seen on all sides. Women weeping for their husbands, and mothers for their children who were no more, and who had finished their days amidst horrible torments, the former having been unworthily whipped and torn with thorns, the latter thrown into burning ovens at Neuilly, and some, after an infamous mutilation, had had their stomachs opened, to make them reveal where the ornaments of their churches had been concealed.

The Saint would have been delighted to remedy all these evils at once, but this was impossible. He distributed his missionaries into several bands, and sent them to the places where the soldiers had committed the greatest havoc. At Etampes they saw only withered, disfigured spectres. Dead bodies, heaped up either at the gates of the city or within the walls, made the wretched inhabitants feel in advance all the rigors of their fate. The missionaries removed from their sight this first object of horror. As all seemed debilitated with weakness, they sent to a distance for strong, robust men to remove the heaps of motley rubbish, which by an almost unheard-of thing in a Christian kingdom, had served as a sepulture for men, women, children, horses, and every animal that had died since the entrance of the troops into the city. The houses were fumigated to make them habitable. The priests of the mission, after the example of their father, considered it an honor to serve the sick themselves.

Vincent, to contribute to their comfort, sent some Sisters of Charity to aid them.

Order was established throughout the canton. Children that had lost their fathers and mothers were assembled and nourished in a house of Etampes. Those who were already convalescent grew stronger; those sick from debility and starvation began to take breath, but many of these evangelical men, who sacrificed all, even themselves, for the salvation and necessities of their brethren, some of whom had already been exhausted in Lorraine, Picardy and Champagne, were seized with fearful maladies. The poisonous air that they so often breathed, the bad food they took, in order to provide better for the poor, and their unremitting cares, day and night, at last proved too much; five sank under their labors. "Happy," said Vincent, notwithstanding the sorrow he felt, "happy to have died, sword in hand, and to have gathered upon the battle-field the palm prepared for those who struggle till the last sigh." Several Sisters of Charity, who had shared their labors, merited to share their crown. The house of St. Lazarus was at this time almost deserted; at least, there remained only some old or infirm men, who, unable to labor, could only raise their hands to Heaven, whilst their brethren combated in the plain.

The parish of Juvisy, Atis, and others in the neighborhood, had been reduced to beggary. The man of God sent thither one of his priests with alms

for those in most extreme need, but this missionary saw at once that no distinction could be made, and that pillage had placed the richest and the poorest upon the same level. Vincent needed all his fortitude to bear up under so many assaults, which new miseries made upon him daily. The ardor of his charity sustained him, he bent not, he made the sighs, tears, and dying voices of those wretched beings, consumed by hunger, speak to hearts. God, who had given him birth to be the prodigy of his age, enabled him to find favorable access to persons who would, perhaps, have repelled any one else. Several seculars joined him. One of these, Mr. Duplessis-Montbart, planned a kind of charitable warehouse, to which those who could not furnish money were entreated to send furniture, garments, and other superfluous things that they might have. The setting up of this warehouse was a great measure of resource at so stormy and troublous a period. The rich did little more than to get rid of many useless things; the poor, to whom these articles were extremely necessary, gained much.

The village of Palaiseau, where troops had sojourned during twenty days, was near a wood; Vincent sent thither nearly every day a cart with provisions and a small sum of money. He did more than he was able. His own house, pillaged by the Fronde, itself needed help, but the Duchess of Aiguillon seconded his pious intentions. She had so much confidence in his words that he was never obliged to ask a second time what she was able to

do at the first suggestion. The holy man took advantage of these happy dispositions, and those with which he inspired all the ladies of charity, to begin in Paris what was continued in the other places that we have mentioned. The blockade of the city, the premature harvest made by the troops, the failure of work, which, in less than a week, reduced to indigence a crowd of artisans, and from affluence, the influx of foreigners, who had fancied that they should here find refuge from the evils that afflicted their own country; all these circumstances, of which any one was sufficient to reduce this immense capital to straits, united in effecting its utter desolation. The evil was great—the remedy was proportionate. Every day pottage was given to fifteen thousand poor in Paris, who, without this succor, would have died of hunger. Nine hundred young girls were placed out of all danger, in private families. He sent priests to give little missions, to instruct the people on the duties of Christianity, and to dispose them, by general confessions, to offer prayers, in order to deprecate the anger of Heaven, and to obtain tranquility for the State.

Vincent took special care of the poor in the immediate vicinity of St. Lazarus. He gave them a mission in his church, having divided the children into fifteen bands, to instruct them more thoroughly; this venerable old man, bending under the weight of years and infirmities, himself taught catechism, and, during all this time, supplied them with nourishment twice a day. He entertained,

for several weeks, eighteen priests, reduced to the most helpless beggary; in fine, he preferred to run the risk of ruining his own house, by borrowing considerable sums, rather than to discontinue a good work at once so pressing and so necessary.

After the battle of Dunes, in which the Prince of Condé and the Viscount de Turenne evinced equal courage, but were not equal in fortune, a large number of our soldiers were transported to Calais, a part of them covered with wounds, the usual result of a long-disputed victory, and the rest exhausted by the bad air of the suburbs of Dunkirk. The Queen, who was there herself, was sensibly touched at the situation of her brave soldiers, who had just effected the annihilation of a numerous Spanish army. She doubted not but that the Sisters of Charity might save the lives of many of these warriors. She, therefore, had recourse to our holy man, who immediately sent four of the most robust of the community, but the most vigorous cannot long sustain excessive labor. Two very soon succumbed—the Queen asked for others, and on this occasion Vincent, in a spiritual conference, testified the esteem and respect which he always entertained for these prudent and courageous virgins: "Gentlemen, imagine four poor Sisters surrounded by five or six hundred soldiers, wounded and sick. See the goodness of God in raising up a company of this kind, just at this time. To do what? To assist the poor, corpo-

rally and spiritually, by saying to them some good words which incline them to think of their salvation, particularly to such as are dying, to aid them to die well; to urge them to make acts of contrition and of charity. In truth, this is touching. Does it not seem to you that it is a very meritorious action before God, for these Sisters to hasten around, with so much courage, among the soldiers to solace them in their necessities, and to contribute to their salvation? They expose themselves to great fatigues, to mortal maladies, indeed, to death, for the sake of men exposed to the perils of war, for the welfare of the realm. We can easily perceive, then, that these poor Sisters are full of zeal for the glory of God and the assistance of their neighbor. The Queen did us the honor to write requesting some more Sisters for Calais, so as to assist the poor soldiers there, and, in fact, four are to set out to-day. One of them, almost fifty, came to me, last Friday, at the Hôtel-Dieu, to tell me she had learned that two of her Sisters are dead in Calais, and that she wished to go in their place, if I would allow her. I said to her: Sister, I will think about it, and yesterday she came to know my decision See, gentlemen and brethren, the courage of these Sisters, thus to offer themselves as victims, ready to give their lives for the love of Jesus Christ and the good of their neighbor. Is it not admirable? As for me, I know not what to say to this, if not that these sisters will be my

judges on the great day of the Lord. Yes, they will be our judges, unless we are disposed, like them, to expose our lives for the interests of God. As our congregation has some intercourse with this company, and since our Lord has been pleased to make use of the Society of the Mission in giving existence to that of these poor Sisters, we are, also, obliged to thank God for all the graces that He has conferred upon them, and to pray Him, in His infinite goodness, to continue to bestow on them the same benedictions."

XXXVIII.

SIMPLICITY OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL.

Simplicity, which many persons consider as a defect, or at most, as only a quality of weak minds, is, nevertheless, the virtue of great souls. Only those who have trod human respect under foot, can speak as they think, and contemning the artifices of the world, its windings, deceits, duplicity, and speak to Kings and princes as did Moses, Daniel, and St. Peter. It is, then, bestowing a decided eulogium on Vincent de Paul, to say of him, with the great Bossuet, that he was a man of admirable simplicity.

In truth, he never resorted to equivocations,

dissimulations and tortuous dealings, to which those who condemn such ways in speculation, recur in order to relieve themselves from embarrassments; if that which seemed to him unjust were proposed, he would say, with simplicity, that he could not do it. If, after having accepted a charge, as it sometimes happened, more pressing cares made him lose sight of it, simple and humble at all times, he would say that his great misery had made him forget it. If thanked for a favor that he had had no share in procuring, he would say so unhesitatingly; in a word, if he did not say all the truth, because it is not good to tell everything, at least, he said nothing which was, however little, opposed to the truth. In recommending simplicity to his brethren, he has, unconsciously, given a portraiture of his own practice of this virtue. By the idea that so spiritual a man formed of simplicity, we may judge the great extent of this virtue, and by the means he employed to teach it, we may judge of its importance.

He said, then, that simplicity is a gift which makes us go straight to God and straight to truth, without display, disguise, human respect or interested views. A simple man considers only God and wishes only to please Him. He never speaks contrary to his interior sentiments, he never acts but in keeping with frankness and Christian straightforwardness. If he does not manifest all his thoughts, because simplicity is a discreet virtue,

which is not opposed to prudence, he carefully avoids in his words everything that could make his neighbor believe that he has in his mind or heart what he really has not. His actions are not less simple than his words; in his affairs, employments, exercises of piety, he uses no artifices, vain pretences, nor hypocritical words. He is not like those who make a small present to gain a great recompense; who make an external show of good works to be esteemed virtuous; who keep a great number of superfluous books to appear learned, or who study to preach well to be praised.

Simplicity in instructions for the poor was a point to which the Saint often recurred. His letters or his conferences cannot be read without its being seen that he feared that his children would be so unhappy as to depart from simplicity, in the wish to acquire the name of being good preachers. He recommended that his brethren should avoid, in their discourses, everything that savored of the spirit of the world, of affectation or of vanity. One of the many reasons which he adduced was that as natural beauties have more attractions than artificial, so simple, unaffected discourses are better received than those that are studied and polished. "Study," said he, "to preach like Jesus Christ. That Divine Savior, being the Word and the Wisdom of the eternal Father, could, had He so wished, have spoken of our most sublime

mysteries, in terms commensurate to their greatness. Nevertheless, we know that He spoke simply and humbly to accommodate Himself to the minds of the people, and to give us a model and style for preaching His holy word. This great Master, about to send His apostles to preach the Gospel, recommended to them the simplicity of the dove as the most necessary virtue, to attract the graces of Heaven, and to dispose men to listen to them and to believe them. These words concerned not only the apostles, but were addressed to all those that Providence has destined for converting souls. Therefore, gentlemen, you ought to take them to yourselves. God delights in conversing with the simple: '*Cum simplicibus sermorcinatio ejus.*' He walks with them and leads them on in security. In truth, only the simple are instructed in the school of our Lord; His doctrine is an enigma to the wise and prudent of the world, as He has Himself declared: '*Confiteor tibi, pater . . . . quia abscondisti hæc à sapientibus et prudentibus, et revelasti ea parvulis.*' In truth, the spirit of religion is more frequently found among the simple than among great ones of the world."

The man of God sent one of his priests into a certain province. "You go," said he to him, "into a country where the inhabitants are, for the most part, refined and much cultivated. Hence, my dear Sir, to be useful to them you should act with great simplicity, for the maxims of the Gospel

are diametrically opposed to the conduct of the world, and, as you go to serve our Lord, you ought to act according to His Spirit, which is that of simplicity and straightforwardness." The priest squared his conduct by this wise advice, and the people, charmed with the candor of the missionary, offered a very fine establishment to our Saint. He accepted it, because he foresaw that good could be thus effected. He sent thither, for the first superior, a man who joined to true talents an admirable simplicity; but nothing is, perhaps, better calculated to manifest the Saint's delicacy in this respect, than the following letter, in reply to a priest, who had written that his heart was all his. "I thank you for your letter," said he, "and for your dear present. Your heart is too good to be put into such bad hands as mine, and I feel assured that you gave it to me that I might give it to our Lord, to whom it belongs, and to whose love you desire that it should constantly tend. May this amiable heart, then, belong henceforth only to Jesus Christ, may it be entirely His for time and eternity. Ask Him, for me, I beg of you, a portion of the candor and simplicity of your heart; these are the virtues that I greatly need, and whose excellence is incomprehensible. I hope that you and your brethren will cast them into the foundations, so that the edifice to be erected may be built upon rock, rather than on unstable sand."

XXXIX.

HIS TALENTS FOR THE COUNCIL OF THE KING.

Anna of Austria, who had suffered almost as much as any one else under the rule of Cardinal Richelieu, was, at first, strongly inclined to dismiss from the management of her affairs all who could be looked upon as his creatures. Jules Mazarin would have been the first sacrificed, and he had already given out that he should return to Italy. Mr. de Béringhen and Vincent de Paul prevented this misfortune, each in his own way; Béringhen, by saying to the Queen that she could not then dispense with Mazarin, who knew the secrets of affairs, and Vincent, from a general principle, preached to this Princess the obligation she was under to pardon her enemies. The Cardinal, therefore, continued at his post, and this adroit, pliant, intellectual, laborious man, rendered himself so necessary, that, by degrees, he supplanted all rivals, and attained as much authority under Louis XIV. as Cardinal de Richelieu had in the preceding reign.

The Queen Regent, who possessed much piety, established an ecclesiastical council, in which

everything relating to religion was examined, and the good or bad qualities of those who could pretend to ecclesiastical dignities. Mazarin, the Chancellor Sequier, Charton, grand penitentiary of Paris, and Vincent de Paul, were those whom the Queen chose to form this council, of which, according to Madam de Motteville, the holy man was chosen head. This dignity, which gave him a high position at court, and which could not fail to procure him the false homages of many who were greedy for the goods of the sanctuary, filled him with sorrow and confusion. He used every possible entreaty to be discharged, but the Queen would never consent. He recurred to God when he saw that he could obtain nothing from men, and he owned to a person, in confidence, that since the day on which he had learned this fatal news he had never celebrated the Holy Mass, without asking the grace of being restored to his former position. He wished it with so much ardor that once, when he had been obliged to take a voyage, a report having spread that he was in disgrace at court, he said to one of his friends, who came to congratulate him on the falsity of the rumor: "Ah! would to God that it was true! but a miserable wretch like me is not worthy of this favor!"

He was not heard by God any more than by men; Providence wished to make him a spectacle to the world, to man and to angels. In fact, his virtue was daily manifest, during more than ten

years that he was in this employment. His humility triumphed over the frivolous applause of the age; his patience and equality of mind never changed amidst the blows that envy, injustice and malignity inflicted on him. It was upon this great theatre that he evinced his inviolable fidelity to the service of the King, his profound respect for Bishops, his love for all ranks in the church, his tender charity for all religious and secular communities. His congregation was, alone, forgotten by him, and, though he was the source whence favors flowed, though the Queen held him in perfect esteem, though Cardinal Mazarin loved and esteemed him very much, he never opened his mouth for himself or for his brethren.

He knew well, that resolved as he was, never to give his suffrage only to true merit, he would make a host of enemies and soon become a butt for the bitterest invectives, but he fully believed that it would be to inflict an injury not to remove from the sanctuary those who were called thither only by intrigue, cupidity or ambition. This evil and the little hope he had of being able to remedy it, penetrated him with grief. Cardinal Mazarin was soon able to fly freely. This prime minister and Vincent de Paul were governed by such different maxims that we might be tempted to believe that they had studied different Gospels Mazarin considered as the friends of God those who were his own friends, and he believed that

when they could serve him they could serve the Church. Vincent judged the tree by its fruits he took for his standard, in judging the qualifications of a bishop, the advice of St. Paul and the councils, and, although he had proper regard for birth, &c., concluding that a man of rank, could, if virtuous, effect more good than another, and often repeated, with the ancient, that fifty stags led by a lion, are of more value than fifty lions led by a stag; yet, he believed that noble blood was not alone a just title to a prelacy.

These two men entered the ecclesiastical council with the germ of opposition in their bosoms. Vincent had concerted with the Queen regent that he would not repair to court unless when called by her majesty. This wise arrangement enabled him to watch over his congregation, and freed him from a crowd of people who were already importuning him about business that belonged not to his province. The Saint went to council in the same outfit in which he went to instruct the country people. He offended not against decorum, still less against simplicity. One desire seemed to pre-occupy him, which was to render himself more contemptible in proportion as he saw himself more honored. "I ask God," said he, "to be looked upon as a fool, so that I may no longer be employed in this office, and may have leisure to do penance."

Distinction gave him more pain than it imparts

pleasure to martyrs of ambition. The Prince of Conde, having in these beginnings of court favor, desired him to sit near him, Vincent said: "Your Highness does me too much honor to suffer me in your presence. Do you not know that I am the son of a poor villager?" "Irreproachable manners, and a good life," replied the Prince, "are man's true nobility: *Moribus et vitâ nobilatur homo.*" He added that it was not on that day that he first knew of his merit. To be enabled to judge better he entered into conversation with Vincent upon some point of controversy and canon law. Vincent spoke with so much clearness and precision, that the Prince went to congratulate the Queen on the choice she had made of a man so capable of aiding her in what regarded ecclesiastical matters and things.

In the first councils at which the holy man assisted, he proposed six regulations which were unanimously approved: "That they should not grant any pensions to bishoprics or archbishoprics, except in the single case allowed by canon law, that is to say, when the titular, after having long served the Church, voluntarily resigns his bishopric, from infirmity, old age or other pertinent reasons. Secondly, that no briefs should be expedited for abbeys, except in favor of such as, besides having the other requisite qualities, should have attained the age of eighteen; sixteen years for priories and canonries of Cathedral Churches, and

fourteen for collegiates. Thirdly, that no brief for vacant benefices be granted, unless they have been examined, and the documents by which claims are laid to the vacant benefices, and certificates of life, manners and capacity be produced, and in case applicants cannot prove that they have the necessary qualifications to obtain the benefices which they are seeking, the right and means to obtain the vacant benefice will be granted to such as have the requisite qualifications. Fourthly, that they grant neither coadjutorships nor reservations to commendatory abbeys. Fifthly, that no brief shall be expedited filling a bishopric made vacant by the death of the incumbent, a coadjutorship or other prelature, except to such as have been priests at least one year. Sixthly, that they shall never grant coadjutorships in female abbeys, unless it is positively known that the rule is observed in those abbeys, and that the religious proposed have attained the age of twenty-three years and have been professed five years. That which gave occasion for the third regulation was the unworthy eagerness of certain ecclesiastics, who, wishing, at any price, to be enriched by the property of the Church, and unable to obtain it by straightforward means, made use of the tortuous ways of vacant benefices. They amazed the lawful titulars by their credit and complicated chicanery, and at last forced them either to give up their benefices or to relieve themselves by a compromise from their un-

just, vexatious claim. Vincent obtained from the council that no brief should be expedited, filling vacant benefices, without their having first examined if the motives which served as a foundation for the claim were canonical. He was ordered to make this examen, and, holding a just balance, he excluded a party of blood-suckers, to whom everything seems lawful which fattens them. By this wise precaution a number of law suits were nipped in the bud, and he maintained, in their benefices, a great number of virtuous ecclesiastics and good pastors, who, without the support of this charitable protector, would have been often obliged to recur to chicanery to screen themselves from these spongers of benefices, to forsake their flock, and to pass entire years in attending to suits at different courts, and often to experience unmerited confusion.

If the plan of the servant of God had been adhered to, in the other articles, as well as in the third, all orders of the Church of France would have been, by degrees, restored to their ancient splendor, but it was difficult to preserve things long on a good footing. The Queen, unversed in business, very soon believed that Mazarin was necessary to her. The Council of Conscience existed in its full integrity only whilst that minister was consolidating his authority. When this was once well cemented, he disposed of abbeys, and later, even of vacant bishoprics, as he thought

would best conduce to the service of the King and his own aggrandizement. Although our Saint was very exact in his advice, when he had said what his conscience and his lights engaged him to say, he remained as tranquil as if the greatest regard had been shown for what he had said; however, as Madam de Motteville says, and she can be believed, the Cardinal found in him, "a man all of a piece, who never dreamt of gaining the good graces of people of rank," therefore to avoid seeing his choice disapproved, he tried to render himself master of the most important nominations.

The Queen confided in him some time, but at last opened her eyes. In the end, she gave no more bishoprics without having consulted our Saint. Notwithstanding these precautions, both were more than once deceived by the false virtue of those who aspired to prelatures, and this Princess was still more frequently, when, during the absence or illness of the Saint, she made promotions without having consulted him.

Indiscreet men pretend that a devotee, (as they call the truly pious,) is unsuited to manage business; that he has more zeal than discretion, that every light dazzles him; and in fine, under pretext of running after a phantom of perfection, he often engages the sovereign in enterprises prejudicial to his dominions. If this principle were true in its full extent, the situation of Kings would be truly lamentable, and nothing could be more dire-

ful than the necessity to which they would be reduced, to exclude from their councils all those that bear the impress and character of solid virtue; but our Saint, alone, fully demonstrates the illusion of a maxim so contrary to the interests of piety. On examining, in order, his personal qualifications, we see that he possessed, to an eminent degree, all those which are most necessary for counsellors to Kings.

What dispositions are requisite to conduct state affairs prudently? The ancient Romans required exemption from disorderly passions and from prejudice; maturity of judgment, fidelity to secresy about deliberations, submission to the authority of reason, from whichever side presented; and, in fine, firmness in executing projects once formed. Now this portrait, detailed as it is, is precisely that of Vincent de Paul; for we have seen that he was exempt from those emotions and sallies to which most men of good parts are but too subject. To this equality of soul, he joined an extreme vigilance to guard against prejudice. We have seen that he was firm in his opinion without being excessively attached to it; well persuaded that others could perceive what he could not, he was always ready to yield to the judgment of his superiors, when not opposed to his conscience. We have seen that after having fulfilled his duty, he preserved a respectful silence and left to Providence the success and issue of affairs. We have seen

that he was a sworn enemy to precipitation, and that as regards secrecy, he preserved it inviolably; never was he known to say a word inopportunely, nor to reveal aught that had passed in council. A man, who, for a long time, had preserved an inviolable fidelity to that great number of persons from all parts, who came to unbosom themselves to him, was very far from revealing those secrets, which, according to the admonition of the Holy Spirit, should be hidden in the recesses of the heart, never to be revealed: "*Secretum regis absconderc bonum est.*"

All these great qualities in Vincent sprung from one principle,—his attachment to the law of God and to the rules of the Gospel. It was from this pure source that he drew his lights, and it must be allowed that the policy taught therein is the most solid. Ministers to princes are not always well persuaded of this, but those that wish can easily recognize that the school of Jesus Christ, alone, can teach effectually how to re-unite that which was always observable in the conduct of our Saint.

XL.

HIS ZEAL FOR THE GLORY OF GOD AND SALVATION OF SOULS.

There is a necesary tie between zeal for the glory of God, and for the salvation of souls. "Who should be looked upon as a man consumed with zeal for the house of God?" asks St. Augustine. "He who ardently desires to prevent offences against God, who endeavors to repair such offences as he could not foresee, and who, when he cannot induce those who have sinned to weep, weeps and groans himself to see God dishonored." Viewed in this light, we must allow that Vincent possessed this two-fold zeal in a very eminent degree. All we have recounted proves that his only aim was to destroy the empire of sin, and that in all his works he sought but the glory of God and the sanctification of his neighbor.

His zeal was prudent, enlightened, unconquerable and disinterested. We will adduce proofs of these four characteristics that would force calumny to bow, if it were not for its unblushing boldness.

First, his zeal was prudent, never violent. He corrected those under his guidance because obliged to do it, but that bitterness in reprimanding, which manifests caprice and partiality, was never to be found in him. He had the admirable tact of giving advice less as a man who struggles with existing evils than as a man who wished to caution against evils that may ensue. During the missions, he denounced crime, but after having alarmed the sinner, he inspired him with confidence. Without flattering the impious man, he evinced for him the tenderness of a nurse. He dispensed solid food to those who were already strong, and milk to such as were but neophytes in faith. In speaking to the great ones of the world, he deviated not from truth, but that truth, so often odious, seemed relieved by the respect, tenderness and exalted opinion all entertained of his probity.

The zeal of Vincent was enlightened, also. The lights of the Gospel, the authority of the Fathers, the decisions of the most celebrated doctors, were his compass. Could he have had one more certain? His zeal, in its moral teachings, was always equally removed from excessive rigor and that relaxation calculated to ruin all. He was never suspected of the first, and it would have been to do him wrong to suspect him of the second. A great fund of good sense, his connection with the best theologians in Paris, his care to have recourse to God in his doubts, in a word, his good

dispositions of grace and nature led him by a sure way, equally removed from extremes. His decisions regarding the property of minors, and dispensations from impediments to marriage are most just, the first being deduced from the principles of St. Thomas of Aquin, the others from the Council of Trent. It was by such rules he desired that his missionaries should square their conduct, and not by philosophical subtleties, whose false light has misled many who seemed not to have wished to be deceived nor to deceive. Vincent, profoundly humble, ignored those insulting airs which accord less to error, than to those who have sustained it.

His zeal was unconquerable. What fortitude and constancy must not that man have who relieves and obtains relief, during a long period of years, for vast provinces, whose necessities are of daily recurrence? A man who, to secure the hospitals of Bicétre and Salpétriere, had to surmount difficulties of every kind; a man who, in the Council of Conscience, knew how to speak before a mighty minister, as if he had spoken the judgment of God; a man who, bending under infirmities and at the age of eighty, gave missions, preached, heard confessions and catechised; a man who, in the expedition to Madagascar, was, like Jacob, a wrestler with God himself. Heaven and earth, man and elements, seemed armed against him Some of his children were buried in the

waves, others fell into the hands of the enemies of France. Some died on arriving at port, others just on the eve of reaping a harvest that would have indemnified them for all their labors. These sad occurrences disheartened him no more than they have disheartened his successors, and Madagascar would still have her missionaries if they had not been obliged to abandon her, when the late King abandoned the island. It even seems that the Saint had to overcome the tried prudence of his brethren. "When Mr. Vincent is dead," said they, "where will we find missionaries to send to Madagascar, Algiers, Tunis, the Hebrides, Poland, &c., or money to defray the expense of missions so distant and burdensome?" The holy man replied that it was to be feared that there were some anti-missionaries clothed in the habit of the company, as there were some Anti-Christs under the garb of the first Christians, in the time of St. John; that these cowardly men were only fit to discourage the rest. "Ah! Gentlemen," said he, "if the congregation, while yet in its infancy, had the courage to give so many missions, conferences, retreats, assemblies, make so many journeys for the poor, establish so many seminaries, so many charitable associations and to embrace all these different opportunities to serve God, it will do still more when time will have given it strength, provided you are faithful to the grace of vocation. If the salvation of a single soul deserves that we

should expose our lives, what an indignity it would be to abandon so large a number of souls to avoid a little expense."

In fine, his zeal was disinterested. Far from traversing seas, and travelling over countries to gather temporal goods, he bestowed all his services gratuitously. He did not wish that on missions remuneration should be accepted for Masses, he induced the people rather to bestow their gifts on the sick. If a wealthy pastor offered his table, it was forbidden to accept it, however bad the accommodations in their power. "I am astonished," wrote he to one of his brethren, "at the request you make to allow the intendant of Mr. Liancourt to defray the expense of the mission of Montfort. Do you not know, then, that a missionary who leans upon the purse of another, is not less guilty than a Capuchin who touches money? I entreat you, once for all, never to give missions but at the expense of your house."

To this first kind of disinterestedness, Vincent joined another more difficult and less common. Devoid of the spirit of jealousy, of which many in the same career are not always bereft, his zeal was like that of Moses, and with him he wished that all had the spirit of the Lord. He saw the success of others with the holy joy of the children of God—published it abroad and at home, and rendered them services which the greater part will never know. To make their labors appreciated,

he went so far as to undertake those of his brethren. He saw only unskillful gleaners in his own congregation, who followed those great reapers at a distance, and who, to find grace before God, should believe that their small ears of corn were only commended to favor by the large harvest of others. But if this great man said, with the wise man, that he tried to pick up a few of the grapes that had escaped the vintagers, the Church, in his office, declares, nevertheless, that he filled the press: "*Et quasi qui vindemiat, replevi torcular.*" The reader can see the maxims and spirit of the servant of God are sustained, in all their integrity among the missionaries.

In fine, this prudent, enlightened, unconquerable and disinterested zeal consumed the servant of God. For a long time this skillful servant, after the example of him, of whom Jesus Christ speaks in the Gospel, had had his loins girt and his lamp shining in his hand to go forth to meet his master and to open to him as soon as he should knock at the door. That last hour was always present to him. He often recalled it to himself and to his brethren. "One of these days," he would say to them, "the miserable body of this old sinner will be consigned to the earth, it will be reduced to ashes and you will tread it under foot. For so many years I have abused the grace of God: *Heu! mihi, quia incolatus meus prolongatus est?* You leave me, my God, and draw to yourself better servants.

I am the cockle that injures the good grain that you gather. Behold me always uselessly occupying the land: *Ut quid terram occupo?* I pray, my God, that your will may be done, not mine."

By degrees sleeplessness caused a great heaviness; he looked upon this as the shadow or forerunner of approaching death. "It is the brother," said he, smiling, "the sister will not long delay." On the twenty-seventh of September, at four o'clock in the morning, he died, gently, without fever, without effort, without any signs of convulsions, as a lamp gradually going out for want of oil.

His obsequies were honored with the presence of the Prince of Conti, of Piccolomini, the papal nuncio, several prelates, the pastors of Paris, a great number of ecclesiastics and religious of various orders. The people, especially the poor, for whom he had labored so much, ran thither in crowds. His heart was encased in a silver vase, which the Duchess of Aiguillon had ordered expressly for it. His body was placed in a leaden coffin and interred in the middle of the choir in the Church. An epitaph, which accords with the simplicity of the father and his children, marks the spot.

FINIS.

A NINE DAYS' DEVOTION

IN

HONOR OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL.

CONSISTING OF MEDITATIONS, IN WHICH ARE EMBODIED MANY OF HIS WORDS ON THE VARIOUS VIRTUES, WITH A PRAYER TO THE SAINT,—ALL PREPARED EXPRESSLY FOR THE AMERICAN EDITION OF THIS WORK.

ST. VINCENT'S LOVE OF GOD.

FIRST POINT. He who loves, fulfills the whole law. Hence, St. Augustine tell us: "Love, and do as you please." In St. Vincent, we see what these words mean. *He truly loved God*, hence, everything in his exterior manifested perfect union with God. All his actions were regulated by that eternal law which is the source of all justice. His life was a constant sacrifice of honors, worldly pleasures, and natural affections, and his heart knew no greater joy than that of meditating on the ineffable glory which God possesses in himself. His most ardent desires were that God should be everywhere known, loved, and served by all His creatures. All that he said, all that he did, tended but to enkindle and increase this divine love in all hearts. He continually intensified the holy ardors of love in his own heart by the most frequent and affectionate aspirations.

It is by frequent and fervent ejaculations that I may hope to attain to the pure, holy, ardent love of my God. Highly should I esteem these aspirations, since St. Francis de Sales assures us that they can alone supply the place of mental

prayer, when duty prevents our giving ourselves to it. My God, my All, may I breathe only to love you! May I live only to serve you!

Second Point. St. Vincent was not content with loving God in word, with conceiving elevated sentiments of His goodness and desires of His glory, but he reduced his love to practice, proving it, as the Apostle requires, by works. Hence, do we find him exhorting his brethren to love God with the work of their hands and the sweat of their brows. "For often," said he, "so many acts of the love of God and other affections of a tender heart, though very good and desirable, are, nevertheless, to be suspected unless they incite to the practice of works of charity. 'For in this is my Father glorified,' said our Lord, 'that you bring forth very much fruit, and that your fruit should remain.' Therefore we should take heed, for there are many who with an exterior extremely well composed, an understanding, filled with exalted ideas of God, are content; but when occasions offer of manifesting their love by acts thereof, are exceedingly remiss. We should remember that our holy faith assures us there is nothing more in conformity with the spirit of the Gospel than first to gain light and strength for our souls in prayer, pious readings, and retirement, and then to communicate some portion of our treasure to our neighbor. This is joining the offices of Martha and Mary.

"My soul, we must never forget that it is not enough to hold sweet converse with God in prayer, nor to speak like angels, since we must also *labor* for God, must mortify our passions, instruct the poor, seek the wandering sheep, and comfort the sick and the afflicted, '*for our whole duty consists in laboring,' first for our own salvation, and then for that of our neighbor.* O! my God, make me love you with my whole heart, and my neighbor as myself, for the love of you."

Third Point. Such pure and holy sentiments nurtured in his heart an ardent desire to procure the glory of God, and to induce all with whom he held intercourse to conceive the

same desire. He wished that a true disciple of Jesus Christ, the Man God, should consider the motives of his acts by questioning himself thus at the beginning of each one: Why do I undertake this thing rather than another? Is it to please myself?—is it to please a weak creature, or is it only to accomplish the will of God, and to follow the movement of His Spirit?

"How much would we merit," adds this great Saint, "if we were to attain to the happy facility of willing all in God and for God? Our life would resemble that of the angels, rather than that of man; it would, in a manner, be all *divine*, since all our actions would be done by the impulse and grace of the Holy Spirit." In his last sickness, when this holy servant of God seemed to be too lethargic in his slumbers, and it was wished to awaken him, so truly was his heart watching, that it was sufficient to mention the *name* of his Divine Master. These, and the like tender aspirations, escaped him from time to time: "O my Savior! My Lord! O Goodness Divine! O my God! when will you grant me the grace to be wholly yours, and to love you alone?"

PRACTICE.

Endeavor every day to make new advances in divine love. Breathe forth ardent ejaculations of love very frequently, and endeavor to love God in very deed, by loving and serving your neighbor in God and for God.

LOVE OF ST. VINCENT FOR HIS NEIGHBOR.

FIRST POINT. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,"—thus did Vincent love all mankind. The foundling, the orphan, the insane, the infectious, the sick of every class, the abandoned poor, the wealthy, were all dear to his heart, and so much the dearer to him for those very reasons which, alas! make so many others turn away with cold indifference or disgust. His love was wholly supernatural, hence, like

His Divine Savior, the greater the affliction and need, the more tender his compassion, and this it was that made the *poor* such large sharers of his time and attention. In every circumstance of his life we may justly style him "Father of the poor."

Have I loved my neighbor in this way? Have not wealth and position been stronger claims on my time and attention than poverty and affliction? O holy St. Vincent, pray for me, that henceforth I may weigh my love for my neighbor in the true balance of the Sanctuary!

SECOND POINT. Did he converse with kings, princes, and noblemen? It was to win them to God and to induce them to dispense blessings to the poor. Did he form associations of Lords and Ladies? It was to consolidate and direct their efforts for the benefit of the poor. Did he found an order of priests? It was for the poor. Did he give missions? It was to the poor. Did he found seminaries? It was to train up priests to love the poor, and to fit them to preserve in their parishes the fruits of those missions he was giving to the poor. Did he establish the Sisters of Charity? It was to give so many ministering angels to his poor; hence, he was sensibly delighted and moved whenever he pronounced the name of these servants of the poor. In his opinion, he could make no more beautiful present to the foundling and the orphan, than a mother in God; to the insane, the idiot, and the galley-slave, than one who remembers that her Divine Spouse, the object of all her affections, was reputed as a fool and an outcast upon the earth; to the sick and the dying, than a ministering angel of consolation, who considers all her cares lavished on the afflicted as so many proofs of her love for Him who takes as done for Himself whatever is done for the least of His brethren.

"For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; naked, and you clothed me; sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came to me. Amen, I say to

you, as long as you did it to one of these, my least brethren, you did it to me."

THIRD POINT. Vincent's love for the poor made them ever present to his mind. Was it cold? Where would his poor find fuel, clothing, and shelter? Did he go to his meals? Who would spread a board for his poor? Did the season prove unfavorable? What new effort could he make for the poor? Did he go to prayer? "Jesus, Father of the *poor*," seemed the dearest title for his Savior. Did he offer the Holy Sacrifice? It was to plead at the very feet of Jesus Christ for the beloved ones of his heart, the poor of this same Jesus, that Divine Master, who gave it as the surest proof of His Divine Mission that the Gospel was preached to the poor.

Who was St. Vincent? Our Founder, and our Model in his love for the poor. Why did he thus love the poor? Because he so closely imitated Jesus, "Father of the poor," and recognized in every poor person a living image of his adorable Savior. How may I imitate Jesus Christ as did St. Vincent? By taking to heart the spiritual and temporal interests of the poor, and loving them really and truly as myself; praying for them, and often calling them to mind, and never looking upon them but with the eye of faith.

ST. VINCENT'S LOVE OF THE FOUNDLING AND THE ORPHAN.

FIRST POINT. Artists, when painting the servants of God, always look in their lives for something, which, coupled with the Saint, will speak to the heart and the mind of those who are to judge their work, forcibly reminding them of the grand characteristics of the hero of sanctity whose image it is wished to transmit to posterity in colors of living light. How genuine, then, the inspiration which prompted the artist to represent St. Vincent holding in his arms a poor little

child of sorrow, and pressing it tightly to his warm, capacious heart.

It was a ruling maxim with this great Saint, in rendering assistance to the poor, to extend his special care to the most abandoned, and for this reason he evinced a love of predilection for poor little foundlings and orphans, as they are the most forsaken and the least capable of helping themselves. God alone knows the sighs and lamentations St. Vincent sent up to Heaven for these poor little children!—what entreaties he addressed to his brethren, to pray to God for them!—what means he employed, and what exertions he made to nourish them tenderly!

A disciple should resemble his master,—I am not a disciple of St. Vincent unless these poor little ones have a place in my heart.

SECOND POINT. Consider St. Vincent's remarkable words: "O! what a want of faith it would be to suppose that while we are procuring blessings for these poor and abandoned children, our Lord would do less for us than we are doing for Him! Has he not promised to recompense a hundred fold everything that is given in His name. And, now, since our Savior said to his disciples: 'Suffer little children to come unto Me,' can we, without being opposed to His will, reject or abandon them when they come to us? What tenderness He testified for little children, taking them in His own arms and blessing them with His own hands! Was it not from them that He took occasion to give us a rule of life, commanding us to become like little children if we would enter the kingdom of Heaven? To exercise charity to children, and to have the care of them, is it not, in some sense, to bring them forth? To provide for poor foundlings, is it not to take the place of their father and mother, or rather, that of God Himself, since he has said that if the mother should forsake her child that He Himself would never forget it? Since our Lord still lives among men, upon earth, in the poor abandoned children, can we think that He wishes us to forsake them? 'Whosoever receiveth one such

little child as this in My Name, receiveth me, and whosoever shall receive Me, receiveth not Me, but Him that sent me.'"

THIRD POINT. The writings of the holy Fathers are filled with the highest encomiums on such as manifest charity to the poor. Can we doubt but that the Sacred Heart of our Most Amiable Savior pleads for all these poor little children who have never offended Him, or scarce know what it is to offend Him, or else, have been scandalized and taught that evil, which, otherwise, they had never known! How holy the privilege of guarding the innocent from the contamination of the world, of exciting in minds, still tender and impressible, a horror of the least stain of sin, and in aiding others to throw off early the yoke of the demons, and to assume the sweet yoke of our Divine Savior! Those who have care of youth of any stage of life have need of consummate virtue. Children have quick perceptions,—they expect to see every lesson of virtue illustrated in the lives of religious, and never need religious hope that scandal is not given when the least impatience, resentment, or uncharitableness is yielded to before them. "He that shall scandalize one of these little ones that believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he was drowned in the depths of the sea." But to encourage ourselves, let us recall those other words of the Holy Scripture: "They that instruct others unto justice shall shine as stars for all eternity."

PRACTICE.

Resolve this day to pray for the necessities of little orphans and foundlings, and to beg and implore that those exposed to danger may be shielded therefrom.

ST. VINCENT'S LOVE OF HOLY POVERTY.

FIRST POINT. "It is great virtue," says St. Ambrose, "to despise the things of earth." Such virtue is rare. In fact, there are only a few that have the courage to eradicate per-

fectly from their hearts that unhappy covetousness, called in the Holy Scriptures, "the root of all evil," and can say in truth, with the Apostles: "Behold, we have left *all things* and followed Thee." Ah! indeed, "Blessed is he that hath not gone after gold, nor put his trust in money nor in treasures. Who is he and we will praise him, for he hath done wonderful things in his life?"

Many incidents in Vincent's life manifest in him a transcendent love of holy poverty, and we can say, without fear of exaggeration, that no miser ever sought occasions of enriching himself with greater ardor than Vincent opportunities of practising and embracing poverty, always testifying by his words and his actions his great love for this virtue. The example of the apostle of the Indies begging his bread appeared to him admirable, and he sometimes imitated it in the country when pressed by hunger and without money, (for he rarely carried any about his person); under such circumstances he would go unhesitatingly to the house of some peasant and ask a morsel of bread for the love of God.

Have I this practical love of holy poverty? *It* alone deserves the name of poverty.

Second Point. St. Vincent says that he early felt a secret attraction of heart, inclining him to have nothing of his own, and to live in community, and when he began to live in this way, he at once evinced, in every possible manner, his love of holy poverty. First, he chose an apartment without a fire-place, for up to his last years he would not consent to have a fire in his room. In his last illness, he was obliged to yield to the affectionate importunities of his brethren in this respect, but even then, he disdained not to husband the wood, lest poverty should be violated and the poor be the losers. To his eightieth year, he never sought any other conveniences than those found in a little room without wainscotting, carpet, matting or any furniture except a simple wooden table, without covering, two straw-bottomed chairs, a miserable pallet, with straw mattrass, but no coverlet or counterpane. He removed from his room several

pictures that one of the brothers had selected for him, not willing to retain more than one, saying that it would be against poverty to have several. When the time came for the Father Visitor to inspect the apartments, Vincent always wished his own to be examined, and that all superfluous things should be removed.

O, my God, detach my heart thus perfectly from all earthly and perishable things!

THIRD POINT. He went to take his refection in the same spirit of poverty, frequently repeating to himself: "Ah! miserable being, you have not earned the bread that you eat." His love for holy poverty made him wish to be nourished and clothed poorly; he was overjoyed when in want of something, either with respect to food or clothing. A nobleman of great distinction said that the poverty and cleanliness of Vincent greatly edified him. Vincent's love of holy poverty did not, however, prevent his being liberal and even piously prodigal, in enterprises tending to the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Speaking to his children, he once said: "Alas, what will befall this company, if it should become attached to earthly goods?—what will become of it, if it gives way to covetousness, which is the root of all evil, as the apostle tells us? There are some great Saints who call poverty the bond of religion—the knot which detaches from earthly things and attaches the soul perfectly to God!" Vincent, having been told that one of his houses was reduced to great straits, he asked its superior if he had recourse to God when in want of necessaries. On being answered that he had, he said: "This is what poverty effects, it makes us think of God, and raise our hearts to Him. Hence, am I greatly rejoiced that voluntary and real poverty is practised in all our houses. There is a hidden grace in this poverty, of which we know not. Never are we richer than when we resemble Jesus Christ."

He once gave his malediction three times over to such of his children as should ever be so unhappy as to yield to the love of perishable things.

O, my Savior! give us this virtue which attaches souls inseparably to your service, so that we may desire and seek but you alone and your pure glory!

PRACTICE

A searching examination of your heart, to see if its affections are wasted upon creatures or created things. A heart truly poor is attached to God alone, and is rich in heavenly grace.

ST. VINCENT'S LOVE OF HOLY PURITY.

First Point. Vincent bore about in his body the mortification of Jesus Christ,—and the life of Jesus Christ was also manifested in him by a purity entirely angelical and a chastity proof against all that could injure it. He insisted that all his spiritual children should be above suspicion in their chastity, for any suspicion, even were it ill-founded, would be more injurious to their society and its holy functions than all other crimes that might be falsely imputed to them. Even in the minutest point, and at the most solemn of all moments, that of death, he wished the utmost precautions to be used. "For," said he, "the devil can make an arrow of every kind of wood to wound the soul when death is near."

Second Point. The purity of his heart appeared upon his countenance, and so absolutely did it govern his tongue, that his words, proceeding from the fullness of his chaste heart, gave proof of his chastity of thought, and of how eminently precious this virtue was in his estimation. Hence do we find him enforcing in his rule every possible and necessary precaution to ensure its preservation. He himself exhausted his body by excessive labor and severe austerities; embraced the greatest humiliations, and observed the strictest abstemiousness, in order to keep his body in subjection. He held all his senses under great restraint, particularly his eyes; never yielding to levity, curiosity, or restlessness. He would never allow his children to speak or write to persons of the

other sex in too familiar or too affectionate a manner, even when treating on matters of devotion. He was remarkably reserved himself in these respects—he spoke and wrote in a becoming, respectful manner, but avoided the use of all such expressions as, though proper, might, nevertheless, give rise to the least bad thought. The *word* chastity, seemed too expressive to him, and he rarely pronounced it, so as to avoid a thought of the contrary vice. He used the word *purity* in preference, since it is more general in its signification. When speaking of depraved characters he would designate them by the title of poor creatures, and their faults as their *misfortune* or their *weakness*.

THIRD POINT. He was not only very precise in his necessary intercourse with persons of the other sex, he was extremely modest in every respect—no fixed look, or the least motion that savored of levity—he always kept his eyes cast down, yet without constraint or affectation—appearing less like a man than an angel.

However, being as judicious as cautious, he did not wish that any one should be uselessly alarmed at the torrent of foul suggestions which often cloud the purest minds, for, to use his own words to a penitent: "It is needless for you to be astonished at the temptations that you have—they are a trial sent by God to humble you and make you fear, but have confidence in Him. His grace is sufficient, provided that you fly the occasion and acknowledge the need you have of His assistance. Accustom yourself to place your heart in the sacred wounds of Jesus Christ whenever you are assailed with these impure suggestions; you will find therein an asylum inaccessible to the enemy."

PRACTICE.

Be very watchful over your exterior senses, and make of your soul an enclosed garden. Never show the slightest familiarity in language, tone, or manner when speaking with persons of the other sex. In holding necessary intercourse with the anointed of the Lord, the priests of the Most High,

let your whole deportment teach worldlings to respect the transcendant purity and sanctity of their character. Profound reverence should rule everything in their regard.

ST. VINCENT'S ESTEEM OF HOLY OBEDIENCE.

First Point. St. Vincent practised and recommended to his children obedience and exactitude to even the least observance of religion, for he said these two virtues, practised perseveringly, make true religious. He advised frequent conferences between members of communities, on the excellence and beauty of these virtues, since they should have a great affection for them, considering the delight God experiences on seeing the exactitude of faithful souls. Their Divine Spouse so loves these virtues, that the least delay in obeying is displeasing to Him. The vow of obedience should be exactly fulfilled, for if religious relax in the smallest thing, they will soon relax in a great thing. All the merits that the creature can amass consist in accomplishing the will of God, and His special will is the faithful practice of obedience and the exact observance of rule. Hence, we cannot serve God better than by the practice of obedience, since it is thus that all His designs will be accomplished in us,—His pure glory will be thus advanced, and the annihilation of self love and self interest accomplished. Thus will the soul attain to the true and perfect liberty of the children of God. "The obedient man shall speak of victory."

Second Point. St. Vincent strongly recommends the renunciation of self-will and its mortification by submission to superiors, since obedience requires us not only to obey promptly whatever is commanded, but to be always disposed to do what is commanded on every occasion; to look upon superiors as holding the place of Jesus Christ upon earth, and to render them great respect; never to murmur against them, since murmuring is a kind of interior apostacy, for, as exterior apostacy is committed by quitting

the habit and state of religion and separating from the community, so, interior apostacy is committed when the subject is disunited from his superiors, opposed to them in opinion, attached to his own judgment in contradiction to theirs,—the greatest evil that can happen in a community, and to avoid it all its members should maintain themselves in holy indifference, and allow themselves to be governed by their superiors.

THIRD POINT. He wished all who are bound by the vow of obedience to ponder deeply these five motives, calculated to establish them in true submission to their superiors: First, the rank of superiors, who hold on earth the place of Jesus Christ in their regard. Secondly, the trouble and solicitude which superiors experience to lead us to perfection, passing entire nights sometimes, in vigils, often having their hearts filled with anguish whilst inferiors are enjoying ease, peace and tranquility. Furthermore, the great reason superiors have to apprehend the account to be rendered to God for the souls confided to their guidance. Thirdly, the recompense promised to truly obedient souls, even in this life, for, besides the blessings which this virtue merits, God is pleased to do the will of those who submit their will to their superiors for love of Him. Fourthly, the punishment those should apprehend who disobey, since God says to superiors: "He who hears you, hears Me." Fifthly, the example of obedience that Jesus Christ has given to men. He preferred rather to die than to be wanting in obedience, and certainly a heart must be very obdurate that refuses to obey through love of Him, who, for love of us, became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Vincent said that those of his children who kept their rules should hope for every kind of grace and benediction from the goodness of God; benediction in their persons, benediction in their thoughts, benediction in their designs, benediction in their employments and in all their exercises, benediction in their homes and abroad, benediction, in fine, in all that concerns them, so

that, the soul being withdrawn from sin, detached from the world and habituated to virtue, may be united to God.

PRACTICE.

Accustom yourself to view Jesus Christ in your superiors; when tempted to disobey, think of what our Lord says to all superiors: "He who despises you, despises Me."

THE HUMILITY AND SIMPLICITY OF ST. VINCENT.

First Point. "Simplicity," says St. Gregory, "is as the serene day of the soul of the Christian; untroubled and unclouded by the mists of fraud and falsehood, envy, disguise, or artifice; borrowing all its light from truth itself, and gladdened by the sunshine of God's presence." No greater praise can be bestowed on St. Vincent than to say that living amidst the corruptions of his times, and in constant intercourse with the grandees of the court, he, nevertheless, preserved his humility, innocence and simplicity of manners, so that his heart was as a mother pearl, which, although surrounded and covered with the waters of the sea, is preserved intact, and is nourished only by the dews of heaven. He semed like a lily of candor and simplicity amid the thorns and briars that encumber the face of the earth. "Simplicity," said he, "makes us go straight to God and to truth, without pomp, bias, disguise, self interested views or human respect." His eminent spirit of simplicity and humility contributed, no doubt, to the happy success of his countless enterprises; drawing upon them the blessing of God and the approbation of men, for there is nothing which is more pleasing to God, or more calculated to gain the affections of men, than humility, uprightness and simplicity in words and actions.

Second Point. As St. Vincent held these virtues in such special esteem, he sought to make all his children imbibe the same. He says that our Divine Savior wishes us to be

simple as doves, and that he delights in the simple and humble of heart. All love the simple, humble and candid, those who use neither art nor deceit, who act simply and speak sincerely, their words always harmonizing with their feelings. Such souls are everywhere esteemed and loved, and what is remarkable, those who have neither humility, candor nor simplicity in their own hearts, love these virtues in others. To comprehend the excellence of these virtues, we should know that simplicity leads us to God, and renders us like God, making us conformable to Him, since He is simple in being and pure in essence. What God is in essence, we should try to be by virtue, so far as our weakness and misery will admit. We must have a simple heart, a simple mind, a simple intention, a simple manner; must speak simply and act simply, without the least disguise or artifice, looking only on God, whom alone we should desire to please. To do this we must be humble, for humility is truth, and to be simple we must be truthful.

THIRD POINT. St. Vincent's fidelity in the practice of these virtues was evident on all occasions and in the least things. It was often remarked that while the great number and diversity of affairs, which continually pressed upon him, made him forget little things,—for instance, to speak to some one, to answer some letter, or to do what had been recommended—he always preferred to make a frank acknowledgment of his fault, however much confusion might follow, to covering it by excuses and artifices, and said that he had always found it better to declare the thing as it really was, because God would then give us His benediction. He often repeated these remarkable words: "God is simple, or, rather, He is simplicity itself, hence, wherever there is simplicity, there is God; as the wise man tells us, he who walks simply walks confidently; but those who use craft and deceit are in continual apprehension lest their duplicity should be discovered, and they be no longer confided in."

PRACTICE.

Resolve to receive all the humiliations that come in your way, never to avoid any, never to excuse yourself,—never to seem to approve what your conscience disapproves; and never to recur to artifices or circuitous ways to accomplish anything.

ST. VINCENT'S SPIRIT OF PRAYER.

First Point. Prayer is a precious manna which God has given to His faithful servants to preserve and perfect the life of their souls—a celestial ambrosia to implant and increase in their hearts every kind of virtue; hence it was that Vincent had ever a special esteem for this holy exercise and a great affection for its practice. He was far from exempting the sick therefrom, and wished them to make it more by affections of the will than by the application of the understanding, and sweetly to maintain themselves in the presence of God and to form repeated acts of resignation, conformity to the Divine will, contrition for sin, patience, confidence in the Divine goodness, love of God, gratitude for His benefits, &c., &c. He himself possessed a very special devotion for praying before the Blessed Sacrament, where he remained so recollected and in a posture so devout that all those who saw him were greatly edified.

Second Point. The prayer of this Saint was eminently practical; he always judged of the perfection and merit of prayer by the disposition brought to it and the fruits derived therefrom,—the knowledge of our own nothingness in the sight of God, the mortification of the passions and irregular movements of nature, interior recollection, uprightness and simplicity of heart, attention to the presence of God, entire dependence on His will and frequent aspirations of Divine love. After prayer, Vincent appeared like another Moses, and if not all luminous, at least, all on fire with love and fervor when going forth from his communications with the

Divine Majesty, and his words, coming forth from the abundance of his heart, revealed the effects that had been produced in his soul. We may add that all the virtuous acts of his life, his humility, his patience, his mortification, his charity, in short, all that he did or said for the glory and service of God, were so many fruits of prayer.

THIRD POINT. "Give me," said Vincent, "a man of prayer and he is capable of everything; he can say with the apostle: 'I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me.' Prayer is an impregnable rampart which shields from every kind of attack; the mystical tower of David which furnishes every kind of weapon, not only for self-defence, but for assaulting and routing all enemies to the glory of God and the salvation of souls."

Vincent believed that the neglect of mortification and the liberty given to the senses, are the causes why so many make fruitless prayers. All spiritual writers agree that to succeed in prayer, the practice of mortification is absolutely necessary, and that to be well disposed, it is not only requisite to mortify the eyes, the tongue, the ears, and the other external senses. but the faculties of the soul, also—the will, the memory and the understanding; in this way, mortification will dispose us to profit by prayer, and prayer will aid us to practise mortification. Vincent encouraged all who experienced dryness and disgust in prayer, to persevere courageously, in imitation of our Divine Savior, who, "being in an agony, prayed the longer," yet we must feel convinced that prayer is a gift of God, and importune Him for the grace to make it well, saying with the apostles: "*Lord, teach us to pray.*"

PRACTICE.

These words were often quoted by St. Vincent: "Cursed is he who doeth the work of the Lord negligently." Unless our religious duties are performed with fervor, they will turn to our condemnation. First, as to attention. Do you keep

your mind fixed on what you are doing, or do you let it wander ceaselessly on vain and idle thoughts? Is your heart fixed on God, or on what diverts you from Him? Do you look upon the time of prayer as a time of idleness, and do you willingly interrupt your devotions? What is your behavior and interior occupation during Mass? With what penitence and humility do you approach the tribunal of penance? What degree of reverence, gratitude and love do you manifest towards Jesus in the sacrament of His love?

ST. VINCENT'S CONSTANT ATTENTION TO THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

First Point. The greatness and perfection of Vincent's love of God was evinced not only by his perfect submission to the Divine will, but still more wonderfully by his constant attention to the presence of His Divine Majesty, for it is natural for one who loves to seek and desire the presence of his beloved, to be delighted in his company, to see him, and to converse with him. Vincent's devout attention to the presence of God was such, according to the testimony of one who knew him long and well, that it is easy to conclude that his mind was constantly attentive thereto; he was never engrossed by business; duties, however multiplied and onerous, left him always recollected and self-possessed. Before answering a question it was his custom to raise his mind to God to implore light and grace to say nothing opposed to His holy will, and which tended not to His glory.

Second Point. The same holy ecclesiastic to whose testimony we have already referred, tells us that he has seen him spend entire hours with his eyes fixed on a crucifix in his hands, and that on different occasions, when sad news or good tidings were brought to him, he manifested the same equality of mind, and this could only have resulted from continual attention to the presence of God. Vincent used to

say that not much could be expected from one who loved not to converse with God. Whenever he was obliged to pass through the city he did so with great recollection, walking always in the presence of God, praising and blessing Him in his heart. When obliged to ride in a carriage, not only did he preserve interior recollection, but he generally kept his eyes closed. He was most exact in raising his heart to God every quarter of an hour, and he recommended this practice as one calculated to renew a sense of the presence of God in the soul, and to recall the resolutions formed in the morning's meditations.

THIRD POINT. So great was Vincent's esteem for this holy exercise that he said if a soul knows how to practice it well, and was faithful in following the attractions which result therefrom, it would speedily arrive at a very high degree of sanctity. Attention to the presence of God renders familiar to us the habit of always doing His will; indeed, the remembrance of the Divine presence will, little by little, be established in the mind and the habit be formed by His grace, so that at last we will live in this Divine presence. How is it that there are persons in the world who have attained to this sublime practice? Lately I met with one who made it a matter of conscience to have been distracted three times in the day from the thought of God's presence. Let us beseech our Savior to confer on us the grace to say, with Him: "My meat is to do the will of Him who sent Me."

PRACTICE.

Resolve to question yourself interiorly before commencing each one of your actions, saying: "Why do I undertake this thing rather than another? Is it to please myself? Is it to please a weak creature? Is it only to accomplish the will of God and to follow the impulse of His Spirit?"

ST. VINCENT IN HEAVEN.*

First Prelude. Raise your thoughts to Heaven—endeavor to form some conception of that full torrent of glory and unspeakable delight that inundates the humble, faithful soul of St. Vincent.

Second Prelude. Pause a moment and consider how countless the number of orphans, of foundlings, of poor galley-slaves, of soldiers, of insane, of afflicted of every rank and nation, now glorious in Heaven, who owe their salvation under God to the charity of our holy Father.

Third Prelude. Beg God, with all the fervor of your heart, that you may show a zeal for the relief and salvation of your neighbor, worthy of your holy vocation, worthy the child of such a Father as St. Vincent de Paul.

First Point. "And I heard a voice from Heaven saying to me: Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, from henceforth now, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, for their works follow them." While we turn our thoughts to the death of our holy Father on this, his blessed birthday in eternity, this happy day of the liberty and life of his poor and faithful soul, they must also rest on the heavenly virtues he so eminently practiced, which prepared him, through a long and laborious life, for his gentle and easy passage to his endless rest. Death had lost its terrors for him, who had not ceased through life to watch its coming by dying daily to himself, and becoming the visible star and guide of so many faithful souls in the path of meekness and humility, in which he so perseveringly followed his Divine Master. Without this ruling disposition in his blessed soul, every other grace, even his immense charity and most excellent gift of understanding and knowledge in the science of the saints, would have been imperfect and fruitless. We must, then, as the last and least of his children,

* Written for the Sisters of Charity, by the venerable Bishop Bruté

examine this day what part we have with him in the spirit of meekness and humility. These two virtues must be in us as they were in him, the basis and preparation of whatever good we may hope for as his children on earth, since their practise is of indispensable obligation to procure that happy death, through which we must hope to be united with him in that joy of our Lord, into which he has so long ago entered. Examine, then, my soul as if this were the day of our own account, our day of departure, too—what has been, and what is our practice of these heavenly virtues of meekness and humility,—and if our time of grace be yet prolonged, what our desires and resolutions shall be to obtain a more perfect spirit of them.

SECOND POINT. The boundless charity of our Blessed Father must be the dearest object for our imitation. The poor and the suffering were to him the members of his Jesus, whom it was his delight to shelter, warm, clothe, feed, foster and comfort, in the tenderest manner possible. In the little infant he saw his *Jesus Himself* in Bethlehem or Nazareth; the ignorant, the sinner, the victim of any spiritual misery, he considered as nearest to the bosom of his Jesus; he viewed them with paternal eyes, would fain have borne them in his arms and on his shoulders—and when he fell on their necks and embraced them with the kindest and most cherishing love, he met on each side, and in every one, with his Jesus. In joining his hands with theirs, he thought that he joined them with those of his Jesus or His angels, to spare the weak a stumbling-block; or, if he could not in the worst danger save them from falling, at least, to receive them before they came bruised to the ground. Uniting his voice with the voice of his Jesus, looking at them with the eyes of his Jesus, he saw in the poor degraded child of earth a fallen angel, a precious brother, a child of his Jesus, dear still to Him, who might, perhaps, be happily brought back to his home and to his Heavenly Father. Oh! my soul, consider, also, our disposition with regard to the practice of this most heavenly and divine practice of charity,—our practice of it with one

another, and let us beg earnestly, through the intercession of our Blessed Father, for a share in his affecting, transforming, animating views of our God in His creatures.

THIRD POINT. The simplicity, equality of mind, and mortification, so severe from its continued constancy, the heavenly prudence and modesty of our holy Father, were crowned and perfected by his singular conformity to the will of God, a virtue which he practised so faithfully during life, that his death seemed only a simple act of his continual dependence on this most holy will, and took place without the usual violence and struggles of nature, but peacefully and tranquilly, as a gentle sleep rather than as the dissolution of nature—a blessed rest from his labors—a benediction of Divine sweetness, an inestimable recompense. Let us strive to conceive the most earnest desire to imitate his virtues and to obtain a portion of his blessed spirit, while we unite in humble thanksgiving for the countless, abundant graces bestowed on him, and the immense blessings which are still the fruits of those graces. We must zealously endeavor in our little part, and daily service, to become, each one like him, a living victim of unceasing love and sacrifice to our Supreme Victim, to whom, with our Blessed Father, we must also be conformed, in *suffering* through a life of self-denial and fidelity, that we may be conformed in glory to our Savior, Jesus Christ, the Divine spouse of our souls.

Holy Ghost College
SCHOLASTICATE
Pittsburgh, Pa.

NOVENA TO ST. VINCENT DE PAUL.

We salute thee, O glorious St. Vincent,—to thee we turn for assistance, for, while on earth, it was thy dearest delight to see thy children constantly making new advances in the love of God and their neighbor. Now that thou art exalted in glory, be not unmindful of us and of our sincere desire of becoming each day more and more perfectly grounded in the true spirit of our holy vocation. Intercede for us, O holy Founder, that we may become like thee, meek, humble, simple, loving, followers of our crucified Master, and obtain for us the grant of our present petition. Ask for us, likewise, a sincere contempt for ourselves, an ardent zeal for the salvation of souls, a holy, untiring ardor in the pursuit of perfection. Finally, O Blessed Father, obtain for us such purity of intention that each action of our lives may be performed with as much diligence and fervor as if each one were to be our last. May the love and esteem of our holy rules and vows* increase constantly in our hearts, and may we, by their more perfect observance, obtained through thy intercession, merit, one day, to receive the bright crown of charity in the mansions of eternal bliss. O! thou thrice happy servant of the Lord, replenished with the three-fold spirit of humility, simplicity and charity; most true disciple of Jesus, meek and humble of heart, pray for us now, and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Add three Paters and three Aves, to obtain the spirit of humility, simplicity, and charity.

* Christian obligations.

Date Due

MR 18 68			
[redacted]			
MR 22 75			

Demco 293-5

922
V768an

STACKS BX4700.V6 A5 1868x c. 40835
Ansart, Andre Joseph.
The spirit of St. Vincent de Paul
3 5282 00259 5299